Tom Ricks: The Ideas That Almost Lost Iraq

Washington MONTHLY

THE STAKES 2008

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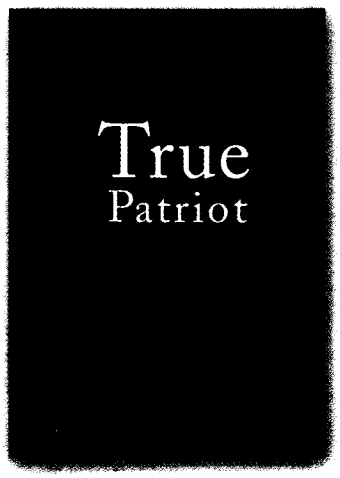

A pamphlet by
Eric Liu & Nick Hanauer
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Washington MONTHLY

VOLUME 40 NUMBER 9
AUG./SEPT./OCT. 2008

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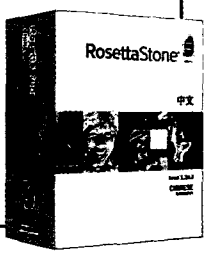

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Editor's Note

PAUL GLASTRIS

Got Issues?

The stakes in almost any presidential election are immense. But they are not always clear. Eight years ago, for instance, the economy was strong, the country was at peace, and it was not at all obvious to a lot of voters that their choice for president in November would have much effect on this happy state of affairs. Many complained that there was not much difference between the candidates. Al Gore was seen as a cautious centrist, despite his sometimes-populist rhetoric. George W. Bush came off as a pragmatic conservative who would cut deals with Democrats, despite complaints by some—including, in my presence, then president Bill Clinton—that the Texas governor was far more right-wing than he let on.

Bush and Gore did, in fact, disagree on a range of issues. But the issues themselves, like what to do with the federal budget surpluses, lacked a sense of urgency. Voters simply couldn't have known how historically pivotal the election would turn out to be—pivotal because it would place George W. Bush and Dick Cheney in the White House on 9/11, and hence able to unleash all that followed. And so it was almost excusable that the race revolved around questions of character and personality and cultural resentment—about Al Gore's sighs and whether George Bush was someone you'd want to have a beer with.

This year, however, voters have no such excuse. The crises the next president will face are happening now: economic decline, financial market meltdowns, two intractable ground wars, an increasingly dysfunctional health care system. No one can possibly believe that there are no great issues at stake in this campaign, or that the candidates' distinctly different views on those issues somehow don't matter.

And yet, as I write, the race is being driven by questions of character and personality and cultural resentment, much to the benefit of John McCain and Sarah Palin. "This election is not about issues," said McCain campaign manager Rick Davis after the GOP convention. "This election is about a composite view of what people take away from these candidates." To the extent that McCain and Palin do talk about policy, it is with stunning disregard for the truth and a swaggering assurance that their supporters, at least, do not mind.

The fact that the McCain ticket has benefited politically by abandoning honest discussion of policy is, of course, deeply depressing to anyone with a residual belief in the basic rationality of the American voter. But it is worth remembering that McCain's strategy is driven by a fundamental vulnerability: poll after poll shows that voters do not agree with McCain and the GOP on most issues. McCain has opted to run instead on a virulent form of American identity politics because that is his only hope of winning.

I wouldn't be surprised if it worked. Americans have always been more susceptible to those kinds of appeals than Democrats like to admit. But it doesn't follow that Obama should stop focusing on the issues. Quite the opposite: his only chance of victory is to move the discussion back to where he is strongest and McCain is weakest.

Obama can also use issues to counter the McCain camp's attacks by tapping into a more substantive strain of American nationalism. Bill Clinton did so in 1992 by thanking Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush for winning the Cold War, then accusing them of selling out American economic interests by refusing to take on our Asian trading partners over their closed markets. The issue landscape today is littered with similar opportunities: Health care policies that disadvantage our companies in global competition. Fiscal policies that put us half a trillion dollars in hock to China. Technology policies that leave Americans with broadband one-fourth as quick as that of the French. Obama should hammer away at these issues, not in high-minded civics-y fashion but with a hint of righteous anger at those who would endanger America's future with ideas that have failed us so spectacularly.

Will a greater focus on the issues really change many minds? Maybe not. But it's worth trying to give voters an honest sense of what the consequences of their choices are likely to be (if only for the satisfaction of saying "We told you so"). Hence this month's cover package, in which we have asked a group of our esteemed contributing editors to think through the likely end results of a McCain or Obama win on the big issues facing the nation—from health care to education to the courts to the economy to our relationship with China. The election might or might not hinge on these issues. But the future of the country certainly will. WM

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The United Nations World Food Programme

TILTING *at windmills*

By Charles Peters

I hope they have a good coffeemaker

I worry about our strategy in Afghanistan, with its reliance on air strikes and increased conventional ground forces, as distinguished from the kind of small-unit Special Forces we need to fight against guerillas. The air strikes have hit far too many of the wrong targets, killing innocent people and inflaming Afghan opinion against us. Some of the air strikes are carried out by drones operated by "pilots" sitting in a trailer, some of whom work for twelve straight hours a day for 120 days.

Don't leave a message at the beep

An irritating new practice has been embraced by the telemarketing business. Whereas the sound of your answering machine used to deter the salesperson, a growing number of them now leave long messages that clog up your machine. And to add to your aggravation, there is now a new technique that permits the marketer to get directly to your voicemail without the phone ringing.

Lies and sex

Just as we were going to press with this issue, the media finally began to call out the McCain campaign for its lies about Barack Obama. Under the headline "McCain Barbs Stirring Outcry as Distortions," reporters Michael Cooper and Jim Rutenberg did so on the front page of the *New York Times*. The day before, on the television show *The View*, cohost Joy Behar told McCain, "We know that those two ads are untrue. They are lies. And yet you, at the end of it, say, 'I approve these messages.' Do you really approve them?"

"Actually, they are not lies," McCain replied, lying again. One of the lies that Behar was talking about was the McCain ad that said Obama favored "comprehensive sex education" for children in kindergarten, when what Obama actually advocates is teaching children how to recognize improper sexual advances. I hope that the press will continue to put the corrections on the front page and the lies inside, rather than the other way around.

The best and the greediest

Since the early '80s, I've been struck by how many of the brightest young people have gone to Wall Street. I would have preferred to see more of them go into government or journalism or into making useful products and giving people jobs. Back then, I was so concerned about the trend that I commissioned an article by Philip Weiss deploring the fact that Steve Rattner, a promising young *New York Times* reporter, had decided to abandon journalism for Wall Street. I foolishly hoped the article would stem the tide. But the tide turned out to be a flood.

The result is described in Kevin Phillips's new book, *Bad Money*, which describes how the concentration of talent in the world of finance and in the pursuit of wealth—instead of in making a decent living while doing something worthwhile—has corrupted those involved, and threatened a nation with economic disaster.

There were so many smart guys trying to get rich that they ran out of honorable ways of achieving their goals and had to resort to inventing financial instruments that were of dubious value but were designed cleverly enough to fool even themselves.

How were the American people persuaded to accept lax Republican regulation and the resulting (as Phillips puts it) "period of speculative indulgence and conspicuous favoritism to the upper income brackets"? My guess is the major factor in the tolerance of the excesses of the rich is that too many average Joes have come to aspire to wealth. My father never wanted to be rich. Neither did I. Neither did most of his friends or mine. Neither does my son, who is now forty-five. But beginning with his generation, the number of people with that aspiration has been growing. Now, even on public television—the traditional home of book readers, concertgoers, and tree huggers—

> In recent years, so many smart guys were trying to get rich that they ran out of honorable ways of achieving their goals.

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there is a popular show called *Stay Rich Forever & Ever*!

I watched a segment the other day during which sober-looking citizens in the audience shook their heads in sympathetic concern as they were told about the estate tax burden on an individual with $5 million. The show's slogan, oft repeated by its host Ed Slott, seems to be "Keep your money away from the government," uttered without the slightest awareness of any obligation of the wealthy to give back.

Names, please

The *Washington Post* recently ran a lengthy story, "How Washington Failed to Rein In Fannie, Freddie," that managed to mention only one name of an official or lobbyist of those organizations. Shouldn't the guilty parties be identified, so the public will know who actively engaged in misdeeds, and who rented their reputations to the wrongdoers in exchange for generous compensation—and who, by the way, seemed remarkably incurious about what was going on under their noses?

Lies and taxes

The claim by McCain and countless Republican speakers that Obama will raise your taxes is the lie that drives me craziest. Its latest incarnation says Obama plans "painful tax increases on working American families," when according to the *Times*, for four-fifths of the population—those making $112,000 a year or less—"Mr. Obama's tax cuts would mean a net savings of more than $900 a year on average, while Mr. McCain's proposals would save people less than half that."

The danger of this lie is that it has been repeated so often, and until now so little disputed by the media, with the occasional correction always confined to an inside page, that there is a real possibility that it has become engraved in the public mind.

I should also note that Steve Schmidt, who became the chief campaign strategist for McCain this summer, has been terrifyingly effective with his lies. But even Karl Rove thinks Schmidt may have gone "one step too far." For once I find myself hoping Karl is right.

Resporesful

"What if the FBI is right about Bruce Ivins?" asks Randall J. Larsen, a former department head at the National War College, in the *Wall Street Journal*. Larsen doesn't deal with the big mystery in my mind when I saw the headline: Why was a man with obvious mental problems permitted to handle anthrax? But what Larsen points out is another cause for anxiety. Ivins, according to the FBI, managed to "convert anthrax spores into a dry-powdered weaponized form"—and he did so without any prior training in the weaponization process. Larsen adds that the type of anthrax spores used by Ivins is readily "available in laboratories around the world."

George must have left the Cliffs Notes around here somewhere ...

Neither McCain nor Obama has any experience in the executive branch of government. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, our most successful modern president, had worked for eight years as assistant secretary of the Navy—the place where policymakers, career military, and civilian bureaucrats intersect. So he learned how the system works, or doesn't work.

For the next president to learn even half of what FDR knew, he's going to require extensive tutoring in the culture of the executive branch. I suggest case studies showing, for example, how the lessons JFK learned from the Bay of Pigs disaster helped him triumph in the Cuban missile crisis.

Another case could explain how recent White Houses have tended to live in bubbles, isolated from the rest of the government and often ignorant of what is going on down below until it comes to the media's attention, usually in the form of a scandal. This could be contrasted with the insatiable curiosity of an FDR, who not only used the Budget Bureau—now the Office of Management and Budget—as his eyes and ears, but also used people he respected outside the chain of command—his wife and her friend Lorena Hickok are examples—to find out how federal programs were actually performing. He knew that bureaucracies gild lilies and conceal bad news.

> For the next president to learn even half of what FDR knew, he'll need extensive tutoring in the culture of the executive branch.

No rest for the weary

There is an understandable tendency on the part of newly elected presidents to treat the period between the election and the inauguration as Miller Time, a well-deserved break from the rigors of the campaign. Unfortunately, this is also the time when great care must be taken in choosing the individuals who will head the various federal agencies and work in the White House. A good case study on the pitfalls of not doing so is Bill Clinton's transition in 1992, with his attorney general debacle and inattention to the staffing of the White House.

We're fresh out of butter ... care for more guns?

"U.S. aid to Africa is becoming increasingly militarized," reports Stephanie McCrummen of the *Washington Post*. Why, you may well ask, are we giving military aid to Africa, when the help the continent needs is with health, education, and poverty? According to McCrummen, in the last decade the military's share of the U.S. foreign aid budget for Africa has grown more than sevenfold, while the share for the U.S. Agency for International Development has decreased by more than a third.

Indeed, the United States seems to be pursuing a policy of rearming the world.

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According to Eric Lipton of the *New York Times*, "the Department of Defense has agreed so far this fiscal year to sell or transfer more than $32 billion in weapons and other military equipment to foreign governments, compared with $12 billion in 2005."

This is of a piece with the news from C. J. Chivers of the *Times* that foot dragging by the United States is holding up an international agreement "to cut the global illicit trade in small arms." What's behind America's failure to embrace an agreement that could reduce violence all over the world? The National Rifle Association. According to Chivers, the NRA regards the agreement as "a thinly masked effort to undermine lawful civilian gun ownership."

The NRA has to be high on the list of truly evil lobbies. It sees every kind of gun control as a step toward gun abolition, and cons its members into fearing that the guns they use for hunting will be seized by federal agents.

> The claim by countless Republican speakers that Obama will raise your taxes is the lie that drives me craziest.

And .7 percent are cases of moose shooting back

Speaking of the NRA, the best argument I've seen yet for gun control is statistics compiled from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention records by Mike Stobbe of the Associated Press. A full 55.4 percent of gun deaths are suicides, 40.2 percent are homicides, 2.6 percent are unintentional, and only 1.1 percent are clearly the result of legal actions like self-protection.

The buddy system

The new president also needs to understand the civil service. Republicans tend to come in with a hostile attitude toward career civil servants, and Democrats with too rosy a view. The truth is that while there are some civil servants who are both talented and dedicated, there are others who are mediocre time servers and a few who are downright incompetent.

New blood is desperately needed at all levels, so the president and the agency heads he appoints must make a major effort to attract able people to the career service. He should know that when civil servants are left to their own devices, instead of aggressively recruiting the best talent available, they prefer filling vacancies by promoting from within, and hiring from the ranks of their friends, a practice known as the buddy system. So any push to recruit outside talent has to come from the president and his agency heads.

The pay gap hustle

The so-called "pay gap" is an example of the kind of hustle the new president can expect to encounter from the civil service lobby. It takes a partial truth—that some important civil service jobs *are* underpaid—and transforms it into a widely accepted falsehood: that *all* civil service jobs are underpaid. Proponents of the pay gap myth use phony comparisons of real jobs with federal job descriptions, which, as Leonard Reed once wrote in these pages, can "endow a file clerk with responsibilities before which a Harvard MBA would quail."

The truth is the average total federal compensation, counting generous health and retirement benefits, is $116,450, compared to $56,615 for the private employee. Even if the benefits are not considered, the average fed gets $77,143 compared to $48,035 for the average nongovernment worker. (Statistics courtesy of the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the Cato Institute, and Joe Davidson of the *Washington Post*.)

Buenos DIAs

The Defense Intelligence Agency has created a new counterintelligence center that, according to Walter Pincus of the *Washington Post*, will carry out "covert operations ... at home and abroad against people known or suspected to be foreign intelligence officers or connected to foreign intelligence or international terrorist activities." If you think that these functions are already supposed to be performed by the CIA and the FBI, you're right. By the way, at the press conference announcing the new initiative, a reporter asked the Pentagon's Toby Sullivan if he would describe some past successes of the DIA. "No, I cannot," he replied. "We're talking about classified operations."

For your Holder folder

A caution to Obama about his possible cabinet appointments: one is said to be Eric Holder as attorney general. Holder has an excellent reputation, but as the Justice Department official who screened pardons for the Clinton administration, he went along with the disgraceful pardon of Marc Rich, which he should have protested. Instead, he gave it a rating of "neutral, leaning toward favorable."

It's a little hard not to suspect that Holder was trying to ingratiate himself with Marc Rich's lawyer, Jack Quinn. Why? Because Quinn was known to be very close to Al Gore, who seemed likely, at the time, to be elected president. And Holder wanted to be Gore's attorney general. In fact, according to an article by Andrew Longstreet of the *American Lawyer*, Holder had directly conveyed this wish to Quinn.

Paying for the overpaid

One problem with government that is also true of many schools is salary increases given without regard to merit, or to whether a job is easy or hard to fill. This results in a lot of overpaid employees, whether they are civil servants, teachers, or administrative staff. If salary increases went only to those of demonstrated merit, or to those who would be difficult to replace, it would reduce not only the cost of government, but also, in the case of some colleges, the tuition bills you or your kids struggle to pay.

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The donors revolt

Speaking of the cost of higher education, I'm delighted to see that alumni are finally putting pressure on their old schools to use their sometimes gigantic endowments to finance the education of the needy. Too many schools, however, are still just piling up the bucks instead of using them for education, the purpose surely intended by most donors.

You're admitted—wish you could join us

I have a stake in the cost of higher education. My son Chris teaches high school in San Bernardino, California, where he has for several years run a program to encourage students to go to college. He's had remarkable success at getting them prepared and then admitted, many with a choice of several schools.

The catch is that most of his students—40 percent of whom are Hispanic—come from families of very limited means. So being admitted does them no good if they can't afford the tuition and other costs. Even at California's most affordable state universities, the costs run between $14,000 and $17,800 a year. At the most sought-after University of California campuses, it is $22,000 to $25,000. The best financial help Chris's students can get—even assuming a solid B average—leaves their parents with $5,000 to $10,000 a year to pay, which many of them simply cannot afford.

Nuclear loses its glow

If you've been tempted by nuclear power advocates who offer it as a partial or complete solution to the energy crisis—as I must confess I have been—you should consider two facts. One is that after having had sixty-three years to contemplate the problem of nuclear waste, we still aren't able to agree on where to store it. The other is the recent news from France, which is always touted as the exemplar of nuclear power's success. Recently, previously undisclosed leaks have been revealed at nuclear plants at Tricastin and Romans-sur-Isere. "They brought to the fore the risks of nuclear power, which French people had forgotten," Bloomberg News quotes a French radioactivity researcher as saying, "and highlights the weaknesses of control and alert procedures."

The world according to AARP

Recently the *Washington Post* has published two long stories on the AARP, neither of which mentions the fact that it is a front for insurance companies. Consider how many television commercials you see selling an AARP-endorsed insurance plan. One of the organization's main partners, United Healthcare, has been caught paying outrageous sums to its executives. So why doesn't the press treat it more skeptically?

> If the AARP is the leader of health care reform, you can be sure it will take care of the health insurance industry first.

The danger is that the AARP is now positioning itself as a leader in the campaign for national health care. You can be sure that if it's the leader, then the national health care we get will take care of the insurance industry first.

An army of "Huh?"

Another case study for the new president could come from a largely unnoticed episode in Bob Woodward's new book, *The War Within*. In 2005, Condoleezza Rice told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the U.S. military strategy in Iraq was to "clear, hold, and build: to clear areas from insurgent control, to hold them securely, and then build durable Iraqi institutions."

In Baghdad, when U.S. Army commander General George Casey read her testimony, he called his superior at U.S. Central Command, General John D. Abizaid, asking: "What the hell is that?"

"I don't know," Abizaid said.

"Did you agree to that?"

"No, I didn't agree to that."

The next time Casey saw Rice, he said, "Excuse me, ma'am, what's 'clear, hold, build'?"

"George, that's your strategy."

"Ma'am, if it's my strategy, don't you think someone should have had the courtesy to talk to me about it before you went public with it?"

This illustrates a classic problem in the relationship between top officials in Washington and those in the field charged with carrying out policy. The top officials can live in a fantasy world, where they think the policy they describe to the press and Congress is actually being implemented in the field. Often, as with Casey, the field is never consulted in the formulation of the policy. And just as often, as with Casey, someone in the chain of command forgets to tell the guys down below what they are supposed to be doing. It is equally common for people at the top to care more about what they're telling the press and Congress than about what they are communicating to the field.

Inside the bunker

Speaking of fantasies at the top in Washington, a doozy was recently revealed in an op-ed in the *New York Times* by three 9/11 Commission staff members. The commission was told that by the time Flight 93 had turned toward Washington, President Bush had "issued the shoot-down authorization" and that Vice President Cheney had passed it on to the military in time. The commission found, however, that the authorization was not issued until after the crash of Flight 93, and was not passed on to the Air Force pilots in the air. The staff members' conclusion: "the Washington establishment talked mainly to itself, disconnected from the reality on the ground and in the air." WM

Charles Peters is the founding editor of the *Washington Monthly*.

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Nutrition Facts

Serve: Kitty Hall

Living Friends	**0%**
Local Family	**0%**
Time Indoors	**100%**

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The Stakes 2008

The choice we make this November, to elect Barack Obama or John McCain, is more important than any decision American voters have been asked to make in a generation, if not longer. This simple truth risks being obscured by the sheer volume of column inches, broadcast hours, and pixels dedicated to inflammatory pastors and teenage pregnancies, so we will say it again, plainly: 2008 matters. As a nation we are fighting two wars of still-uncertain outcome and trying to stave off a host of looming economic, environmental, and geopolitical crises. Our fiscal situation and health care system are nearing the breaking point. On all of these issues, Obama and McCain offer very different ideas. Rarely, if ever, has so much been at stake in an election year.

Trying to predict a candidate's performance in office based on what he or she has done in the past, or said on the campaign trail, is a notoriously tricky business. Few people would have guessed that the Texas governor who inveighed against "using our troops as nation builders" during his first debate with Al Gore in 2000 would attempt to entirely remake a large swath of the Middle East two and a half years later. On the other hand, a closer scrutiny of George W. Bush's environmental record in Texas would have helped us anticipate his flat-footed response to global warming—and some important elements of his leadership style. The bottom line: you can't predict the future, but you can try to avoid nasty surprises.

With this in mind, we asked eight of our contributing editors to consider the looming challenges that America is likely to face—in the economy, education, the courts, and other areas—during an Obama or McCain presidency, and how, based on what we know about the two men, they are likely to handle them.

— The Editors

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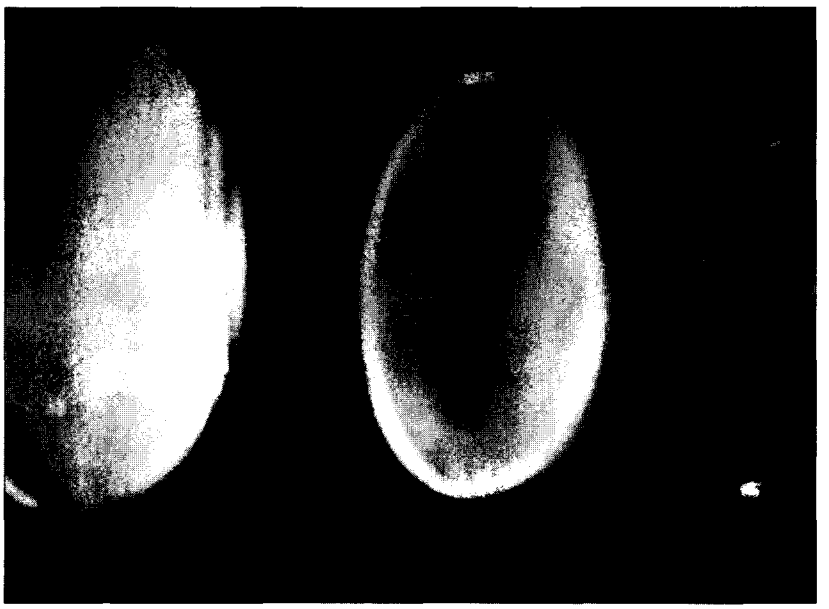
How the World Sees Us, and How We See Ourselves

By Jonathan Alter

For political reasons, Barack Obama cannot stress it on the campaign trail, but the stakes in 2008 are simple: the restoration of our image in the world and our image of ourselves. Everything else flows from that.



America's prestige in the world is central not for grandiose reasons but strictly pragmatic ones. Every big international problem nowadays must be addressed multilaterally, from terrorism to climate change to Russian aggression to Iranian nukes to AIDS to poverty. Without global cooperation, none of these issues can be confronted. And without American leadership, global cooperation will be spotty at best. The United States as "the essential nation" is not neocon exceptionalism run amok; it's a straightforward description of the bare requirements for problem solving in a complex world.

I think of it like the scene in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in which Tom gets his friends to help him paint Aunt Polly's fence. The United States can't and won't paint the fence of global problems by itself. We have to charm and manipulate other nations into helping, or we'll all get a whipping.

Our allies and their people understand the stakes. That's why 200,000 well-wishers showed up to hear Obama in Berlin in July. I was there, and met Germans who had organized Obama clubs in their suburban towns. They wore "Obama Tsunami" T-shirts. Why? Partly because he's cool, but mostly because they know that only Obama has a chance—just a chance—to lead again as the Americans did for so many years. The Germans I talked to ached for it.

McCain would try to lead, too, but in a twentieth-century way that would attract few followers. American prestige would remain at its current low level—or, if he indulged his instinct for saber rattling, it would sink further. By the time another president who could inspire the world came along, China would be nearly the largest economy on earth and no doubt determined to impose its values on at least some parts of the world. The window for restoring American prestige is very short.

The stakes are high domestically, as well, and not just because Obama has some only-Nixon-could-go-to-China opportunities on issues like curbing entitlements and bringing more accountability to education.

In recent years, we have increasingly perceived ourselves as a tolerant people, willing to think anew about the prejudices of the past. Much of the economic dynamism of the country—the vibrancy we cherish—comes not just from the fact of this openness but from our psychic investment in it. Even when the government lets us down badly, as it has in the recent past, we think of ourselves as a good and decent people. Misguided, perhaps, and easily fooled. But good. Even Arabs who hate the U.S. government under either party always insist that they like the American people.

So what happens if we wake up the day after the election to find that the nation has rejected an exceptionally intelligent, thoughtful, and eloquent candidate in a year when 80 percent of voters think we're on the wrong track? To what would we attribute Obama's defeat? The inescapable conclusion would be that, no, America is not ready for a black president after all.

Out, damn'd spot! The stain of America's original sin would spread further yet, pushing us into a past we had hoped to transcend. The normal pain of one party losing an election would be intensified enormously by the pain of history. Republicans (who barely tolerate McCain) wouldn't cheer much; they would know in their hearts that the party of Lincoln had completed its metamorphosis into the party of cynicism.

The nation would survive. McCain might even prove a decent president. But we would end 2008 with less respect in the world and less faith in ourselves, the faith on which all else depends. WM

Jonathan Alter is a senior editor and columnist for *Newsweek* and a contributing editor of the *Washington Monthly*.

Daniel Price

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Your Salary in 2016

By Kevin Drum

During his acceptance speech at Invesco Field in August, Barack Obama earned big applause for a line that compared Democratic and Republican economic policies. "We measure progress," he told the partisan crowd, "in the twenty-three million new jobs that were created when Bill Clinton was president—when the average American family saw its income go up $7,500, instead of go down $2,000, like it has under George Bush."

As rhetoric, it was effective. But was it a fair point, or a cheap shot? It's true that the Bush expansion was one of the weakest economic recoveries in postwar history, but can you really lay the blame for that at the feet of the president? Isn't it the case that, ritual campaign promises to the contrary, presidents actually have very little influence on the economy?

The conventional wisdom among economists says yes, but a growing mountain of historical data suggests that they may be wrong. In the postwar era, it turns out, Democratic presidents consistently produce higher growth rates, lower unemployment, better stock market growth, and less income inequality than Republican presidents. Nobody quite knows why, but the results are surprisingly robust.

Within the economics profession this topic is known as the study of "political business cycles," and I first became interested in it ten years ago, before the dot-com boom of the Clinton era and the weak recovery of the Bush era. Even back then the data was clear. Add up growth rates under Democratic administrations, and you get a higher number than under Republican administrations. Ditto for employment levels. Inflation rates are about the same. Do it again with lag times, since presidents inherit economies from their predecessors, and you get the same result. Change the lag time from one year to two, or three, or four, and you *still* get the same result. Fast-forward to 2008, and the results become even more dramatic. We've now had eleven presidents since World War II, with over sixty years of data points to draw from, and no matter how you slice the results, Democratic presidents are better for the economy.

Why? The answer is complicated, not least because it's a subject that's inherently partisan and most economists probably prefer to stick to more neutral ground. Nonetheless, it's been a small but active area of interest among academic economists for more than thirty years, and it's one that recently got some time in the limelight thanks to the publication of *Unequal Democracy*, a book about political business cycles by Princeton political scientist Larry Bartels that's accessible to professionals and laymen alike.

To begin with, Bartels lays out the basic evidence for partisan economic differences since World War II. Annual economic growth is over a point higher under Democrats than Republicans. Unemployment is more than a point lower. Income growth among poor families is two points higher, among the middle class a point higher, and even among the rich about 0.2 percent higher. And growth is spread more evenly under Democrats too: income inequality stays about the same under Democratic administrations but grows consistently under Republicans. Inflation rates, meanwhile, which conventional wisdom suggests should be a Republican strong point, are about the same no matter who's in power. What's more, none of this is a coincidence. It's not just that Republican presidents are unlucky. The results stay robust even under a wide range of statistical tests.

If Barack Obama is elected president, the economy over the next eight years will be better than if John McCain is elected. In fact, I'll go further and put some hard numbers to that prediction.

Still, not everyone is convinced. Princeton economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman, for example, said recently that he had not written about Bartels's results before now because he couldn't figure out a "plausible mechanism" that might account for them. But then he went on to draw an intriguing parallel to Alfred Wegener, the German geologist who first proposed the theory of continental drift in 1912 but was roundly ignored during his lifetime. Why? Because even though Wegener had accumulated plenty of evidence in favor of his theory, there was no plausible mechanism to explain it. Continents are big pieces of rock, after all. How can they drift?

Well, we all know how *that* story ended: thirty years after Wegener's death, scientists discovered that continents sit on top of a hot, viscous layer of earth that does indeed allow them to move over geologic timescales. The resulting theory of plate tectonics is what explains both California earthquakes and the reason that South America and Africa look like matching pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It turned out there was a plausible mechanism for Wegener's theory after all, which leads Krugman to ask, "So is Larry Bartels the Wegener of income distribution?"

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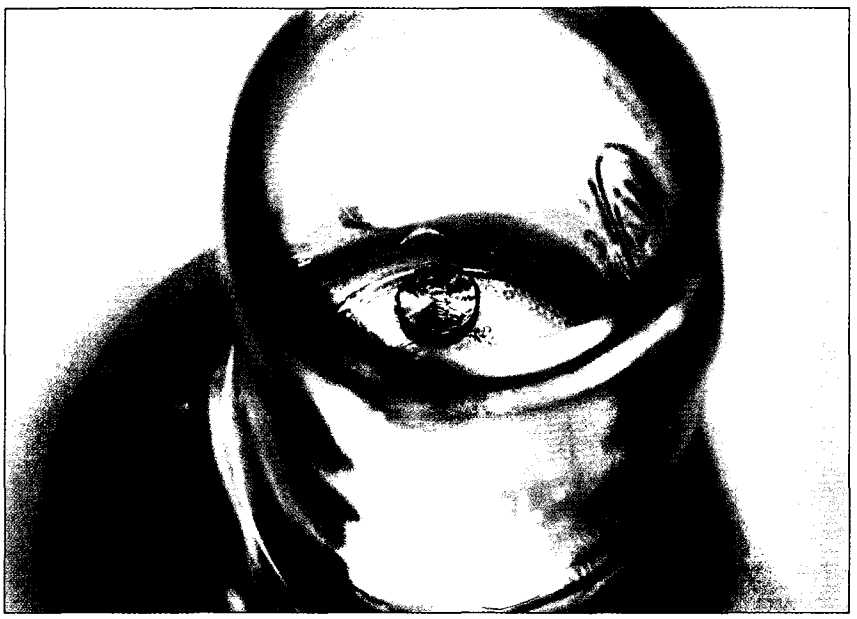
Maybe. Bartels's mechanism is twofold. First, he demonstrates an odd regularity in the data—although Republicans *on average* are worse for the economy than Democrats, there's one specific period when they're better: during election years. And ever since the pioneering work of Ray Fair in the late 1970s we've known that voters don't respond to average economic conditions. They respond almost exclusively to economic conditions during election years.

But this just pushes the question back a step: Why is there such a partisan difference in economic performance during election years? Bartels's answer reaches back to the "honeymoon period," the first year after an election, during which presidents have the maximum leverage to implement their economic program. Democrats tend to focus on employment and middle-class wage growth, which is reflected in things like job creation programs, increases in the minimum wage, more generous EITC benefits, worker-friendly appointments to the National Labor Relations Board, pro-unionization policies, and so forth. The result is a spike in economic activity, but it's a spike that has mostly worn off by the fourth year of their term.



Republicans, by contrast, tend to focus their honeymoon period on tax cuts for high earners and inflation-fighting measures. This may produce poor economic results on average, but it turns out to be timed to briefly produce a spike in activity three years in the future. Add in some extra generous spending just before election years and a possible partisan boost from the Fed (research by University of Texas economist James K. Galbraith suggests that, controlling for economic conditions, the Fed's monetary policy during election years is looser for Republican presidents than for Democrats), and you get consistently great economic performance during campaign seasons.

Bartels's model accomplishes two things. First, it's a start at proposing a plausible mechanism for partisan differences in economic performance: it turns out that it really is due to substantive differences in economic preferences between the parties, mostly focused on what they get done in the first year of each presidential term. Second, it answers the obvious objection to this theory: If Republicans really are consistently worse for the economy, how could they ever get elected? The answer is that while they may not perform well on average, they do perform well during the one year in four when it counts.

There are more twists and turns to the story, but this is the gist: Democrats really are better for the economy than Republicans, and it really does seem to be related to differences in their economic programs. Given that, then, I'll make this prediction: If Barack Obama is elected president, the economy over the next eight years will be better than if John McCain is elected. In fact, I'll go further and put some hard numbers to that prediction. Here they are:

If Obama wins, unemployment will average about 5 percent. If McCain wins it will average about 6 percent.

If Obama wins, real GDP growth will average about 3 percent per year. If McCain wins it will average less than 2 percent per year.

If Obama wins, poor families will see their incomes grow by more than $6,000 during the next eight years. If McCain wins their incomes will grow by less than $1,000.

If Obama wins, middle-class families will see their incomes grow by about $13,000 during the next eight years. If McCain wins their incomes will grow by about $5,000.

If Obama wins (hold on to your hats for this one), rich families will see their incomes grow by about $36,000 during the next eight years. If McCain wins their incomes will grow by about $32,000.

If Obama wins (hold on to your hats again), the stock market will perform better: the average return on stocks compared to Treasury bills will be about 9 percent. If McCain wins it will be about 4 percent.

If Obama wins, the national debt will grow about $150 billion per year. If McCain wins it will grow $400 billion per year. (For more, see Gregg Easterbrook, page 15.)

And no matter who wins, average annual inflation will be around 4 percent.

So that's that. Look me up in 2016 and let me know how good my crystal ball is. WM

Kevin Drum is a blogger and staff writer for *Mother Jones* and a contributing editor of the *Washington Monthly*.

Panoramic Images

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The Size of the Debt

By Gregg Easterbrook

The announcement that the federal government is planning to pour as much as $700 billion into a bailout of private banking and insurance firms has brought the unpleasant subject of debt back into the news. Debt is an issue that voters don't normally want to hear about, in part because Congress has been borrowing for bailouts, and everyone wants a bailout. But bailouts based on borrowing mean more debt.

The ballooning debt is an issue of vital importance to the nation's future. Debt has to be repaid, and a useful rule of thumb is that every dollar borrowed today subtracts two dollars from future growth. Homeowners borrowed, borrowed, borrowed as if tomorrow would never come, and it came. Why should we think the national balance sheet will be any different?

The two presidential candidates are likely to approach debt in very different ways. Before focusing on the candidates, though, let's take a closer look at the debt monster—a subject that until recently had strangely disappeared from politics and political commentary.

First is the distinction between annual deficits and overall national debt. Even before the latest round of bailouts, the federal deficit was projected to reach a record $482 billion in fiscal 2009. (The true figure is actually $562 billion, but the White House refuses to include war borrowing in its calculations.) Although that $562 billion deficit sounds catastrophic—topping the previous record deficit, in 2004, by nearly $100 billion in real terms—it is not necessarily a killer problem. Because the economy keeps growing, that figure will represent only 3.5 percent of GDP, compared to 6 percent during the mid-1980s. The killer problem is, rather, the national debt—the total amount of government borrowing, plus committed interest costs. Interest causes the national debt to compound, and the national debt is spiraling out of control.

Consider: it took the United States 209 years, from 1789 to 1998, to compile the first $5 trillion in national debt. It has taken just ten years to compile the second $5 trillion. The national debt was $5.7 trillion when George W. Bush took office; currently it is set to rise to $11.3 trillion. Want another shocker number? Just a generation ago, in 1980, the national debt ceiling was $2.3 trillion, stated in today's dollars; in a single generation, the debt has quintupled.

Even adjusting for inflation, there has been more undisciplined spending and runaway borrowing under George W. Bush as under all previous presidents combined. In both the White House and Congress, the sense of responsibility about the use of public debt has completely collapsed.

For instance, compare the Vietnam and Iraq Wars. Congress and presidents of both parties paid for the Vietnam War by imposing taxes, and so during that conflict the U.S. national debt rose by just $9 billion in today's dollars. In contrast, the Iraq War is being paid for entirely by borrowing. So far the war has cost at least $850 billion, every penny of which has been passed along to those too young to vote. And the spendthrift spree is far from finished. U.S. forces will be in Iraq for at least two more years, and soon the government will also need to cover large disability payments for wounded soldiers, plus pensions and educational costs. Most estimates anticipate that the Iraq War will ultimately add $2 trillion to $3 trillion to the national debt.

In a single generation, the national debt has quintupled, to an expected $11.3 trillion. The recent runaway increase has mainly come at a time when the economy was strong, the sort of time when debt should be retired.

Although much of the debt liability was incurred when Republicans controlled all three branches of government, undisciplined, irresponsible borrowing in Washington has become the norm for both parties. Even before the mortgage rescue bill, the federal government committed up to $35 billion in borrowing to bail out Bear Sterns, about $160 billion for economic stimulus checks, and $288 billion in the latest farm bill. The new farm bill spends more than twice the inflation-adjusted amount of the largest previous farm bill, even though agricultural prices are at record highs, most farms are now quite profitable, and lower, not higher, subsidies would seem to be called for. No wonder so many Americans signed gimmicky mortgages they couldn't afford. They were simply following Washington's example—borrow irreponsibly, and let someone else pick up the tab later.

The recent runaway increase in the national debt has mainly come at a time when the economy was strong, the sort of time when debt should be retired. Today the economy is weak. But most of the borrowing is not a response to the economy's weakness. The borrowing is the *cause* of the weakness. An out-of-control runup in the national debt drives down the value of the dollar, which in turn drives up oil prices. A weak dollar and high oil prices are the two lead-

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ing economic problems of the moment, and both have resulted from undisciplined borrowing. Every time you borrow against your house, you make the house worth less. (To you, at least.) George W. Bush, with help from a feckless Congress, has made the nation worth less. (To us, at least—perhaps not to buyers from the Persian Gulf states.) Because the nation is worth less, the economy sputters.

Now, the election. If history is any guide, McCain would have trouble doing much about the national debt, because he would have to admit that the presidents of his party have been the worst villains. According to figures from George W. Bush's Office of Management and Budget, the national debt has seen an average annual increase of $405 billion under Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and George W. Bush, compared to $156 billion under Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. (These figures are in absolute, not inflation-adjusted, dollars, and do not include the projected $700 million Wall Street bailout.) Furthermore, no matter how much the economy grows, tackling the debt would require at least some higher taxes on the affluent, setting McCain on a collision course with the power brokers of the GOP. The odds of McCain confronting the Republican establishment about taxes are not good.

Barack Obama, by contrast, has history on his side. Although Democrats on Capitol Hill have enabled George W. Bush's irresponsible borrowing, recent Democratic presidents have been stricter than recent Republican presidents about fiscal responsibility, so debt is an issue where Obama's party holds the high ground. And he has started to make the case for prudence to the public. Speaking with Rick Warren at Saddleback Church, he said, "If we believe in good schools, if we believe in good roads, if we want to make sure that kids can go to college, we don't want to leave a mountain of debt for the next generation. Then we've got to pay for these things, they don't come for free, and it is irresponsible [to act as if they come for free] ... I believe it is irresponsible intergenerationally for us to invest or for us to spend $10 billion a month on a war and not have a way of paying for it."

With that history in mind, then, what are the candidates promising to do? Sadly, reining in the debt does not feature prominently in either man's rhetoric. McCain has pledged $200 billion in new annual tax breaks. He has also promised to slash spending, without naming any specific cuts—the oldest trick in the politician's playbook. Obama has promised to cut middle-class taxes, but also to raise the capital gains tax rate and impose Social Security taxes on income above $250,000. (Social Security taxes currently stop at about $102,000.) According to the nonpartisan Center for Tax Policy, neither candidate's campaign proposals would reduce the debt. But CTP estimated that McCain's proposals would add another $1 trillion in debt, while Obama's would add a mere $150 billion.

We can, however, safely assume that all of the candidates' policies and white papers may be thrown out the window when the next president takes office and assesses the state of the nation's purse. Perhaps McCain will return to his maverick ways and become a debt hawk, admonishing Republicans for their willingness to spend, spend, spend and hand the bill to our children. But that's a long shot at best.

There seems to be a greater likelihood that Obama will speak honestly to the nation about the debt. The image of a conventional liberal rolling up his sleeves to reduce the debt has a "Nixon goes to China" feel about it. Obama is a future-focused candidate, and the debt is nothing if not a grave and growing peril to the country's future. WM

Gregg Easterbrook is a contributing editor to the *Washington Monthly*, the *Atlantic*, and the *New Republic*. His latest book is *The Progress Paradox*. Julia Pilcer of Johns Hopkins University provided research assistance for this essay.

Jonathan Nourak

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What *Xiao* Bush Got Right

By James Fallows

If the election were only about China policy, the choice would be easy: Reelect George W. Bush. An administration that has damaged U.S. interests in nearly every other part of the world has done a surprisingly good job in dealing with China. At a private dinner in Beijing just before the Olympics opened, the first President Bush said how impressed he was with what his son had achieved. (George H. W. Bush, still beloved in China after his days as the first permanent U.S. representative there in the 1970s, is known as *Lao* Bush, "Old Bush." His son is *Xiao* Bush, "Little Bush." The terms are not quite so blunt in Chinese—"Old" is more respectful, "Little" more affectionate. But still.) *Lao* Bush said that he had spoken recently with China's president, Hu Jintao, who told him that under *Xiao* Bush U.S.-China relations were "better than ever before." And "as a proud father," Old Bush said, he considered that very good news.

What is good for Hu Jintao is not necessarily what's good for America. But in this case, Hu and Bush were correct. This is the rare case where we can observe what the current Bush administration has done right—with the certainty that it can be done better by whoever follows him.

Bush's main achievement is to remember, recognize, and constantly reemphasize that two contradictory-sounding points about China are both true, and that both are likely to remain true for a very long time. One is that China is a problem, for America and for the world. It locks up people arbitrarily, and was brazen enough to do so even while on display to the whole world during the Olympic Games. It tightly controls the national media. It crassly supports odious regimes that control crucial raw materials (America also has some experience in this field), and then blandly deflects criticism by saying that to try to stop evils in Darfur or Burma would be to violate its sacred principle of not interfering in others' affairs.

China's economic system has become much more integrated into America's corporate structure than Japan's ever was. Most of the exports that pour daily from Chinese companies are actually ordered and made by foreign-owned, largely American firms: Nike, Apple, Dell, Wal-Mart, and so on. From a strict economic-benefit standpoint, this interaction has helped many people in America: employees and owners of those brand-name companies, whose profits increase because of lower-priced Chinese products; consumers, especially those on tight budgets, who benefit as "the China price" holds retail prices down; and everyone in America who has taken advantage of China's roughly $2 trillion subsidy of U.S. government debt. But the process has obviously hurt those who have lost factory jobs, and as China's power expands, so could its harmful impacts on America. And this doesn't even take us to food-safety problems, or possible conflict over Taiwan, or the future of Tibet.

But the second important truth is this: China is not going away. No one outside China can force or even entice the government to change practices outsiders don't like. There is a short nationalist fuse here, which can be ignited very quickly by perceived slights (what is described here in official agitprop as "hurting the feelings of the Chinese people"). The world got a glimpse of this in the furious internal Chinese reaction to protests against the Olympic torch relay in cities around the world. But based on everything I have seen in two-plus years in China, the country is not "anti-American" in any deep way. The U.S. has a lot to gain from figuring out a way to work and live with China, and a lot to lose from failing to do so.

On the whole, Bush has taken a nuanced and realistic approach to China that ... well, makes you ache when you think of other areas of his policy. The challenge for the next president is to maintain and improve that balance.

Anyone who thinks about climate change and the world environment knows that the problem will be easier to deal with if the Chinese are made into part of the solution, and flatly impossible if they are not. Anyone trying to work out a sensible defense policy for America will need to tamp down the neocons who tried to gin up a U.S.-China showdown in the early days of the Bush administration, and who will try to do so again. But America's real defense issues will become immeasurably more expensive and difficult to resolve if China becomes a serious worldwide military challenge to America, as it simply is not now.

When George W. Bush has talked about China in the last few years, he has always made both points: we disagree with China, and we want to work with China. He showed this most recently in a speech in Thailand, just before he arrived for the Olympics. Bush, unlike most candidates to succeed him, had never wavered in his intention to attend the Olympic opening ceremonies. Staying away would have been a pointless insult, perceived as such by most Chinese. But at every point he also said: We think Chinese people de-

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serve more liberties, and we think the government is wrong to lock them up.

There are problems with the overall Bush policy. He has let the Chinese use the Global War on Terror as cover for cracking down on their own Muslim minority. His officials have wasted too much time talking about the dollar-RMB exchange rate, which is a secondary issue. But on the whole, he has shown a nuanced and realistic worldview that ... well, that makes you ache when you think of other areas of his policy.

Uncreative as it sounds, the challenge for the next president is to maintain the same balance, and do a better job of it. Continued adaption to changing realities; a better deal for the Americans who are being hurt by the economic interaction; much, much more aggressive progress on addressing China's pollution problems. How do the two candidates measure up here?

Stump speeches and debate answers are a notoriously inaccurate guide. All candidates from both parties took a tough anti-China line in the primaries, most often citing Tibet and the poison-toy peril. This is how presidential politics works. On the campaign trail in 1992, Bill Clinton criticized Old Bush for coddling the "butchers of Beijing." In office, Clinton intensified U.S. interactions with China. You can call this capitulation or co-optation. To me, it's the process of each new president recognizing the two truths about the country.

We don't learn much from the candidates' Web sites or their issues papers. Barack Obama's is an earnest checklist of the main issues in the relationship. John McCain's is a less detailed version of the same thing.

So we go on what we know about the candidates, their casts of mind and their past records in dealing with new issues. We want someone capable of seeing a big, complicated, important relationship that will affect American interests for decades to come—not someone who seizes on one isolated point or sticks to a slogan. We want someone who is willing to play chess, to think many moves in advance and not to take steps impatiently or out of pique. We need someone who can push back against the budgeters and threat mongers who will try to cast China as a military peril. We want someone who is ready to think creatively about how unavoidable global engagement can create opportunities rather than burdens for the Americans who have been hurt thus far. And we want someone who will speak up clearly and confidently about the political ideals that are the basis of the American republic.

On the last criterion, we have two candidates who are equally qualified to explain American ideals to the world. On all the others—it's not even close. WM

James Fallows is a national correspondent for the *Atlantic*, currently based in China, and a contributing editor of the *Washington Monthly*.

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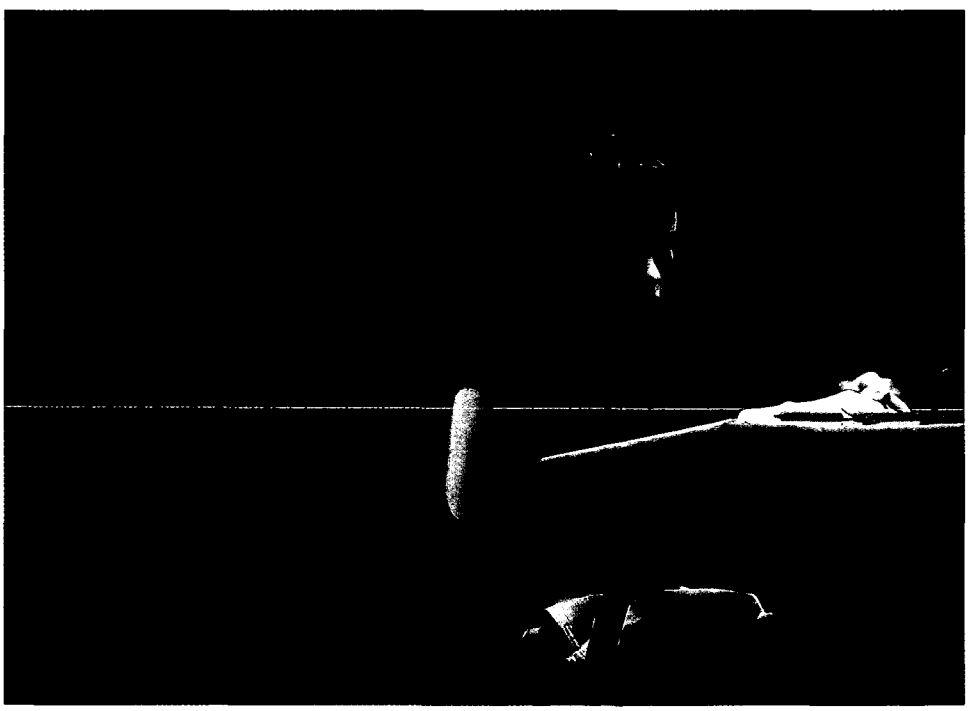
What No Child Left Behind Left Behind

By Nicholas Lemann

The biggest upward ratchet ever in the federal government's role in public education—historically a state and local function—and possibly the most significant piece of domestic social legislation since the Great Society is George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind law, which sailed through Congress in the spring of 2001. Perhaps because so many of them don't send their children to public school, the American chattering classes have been strangely uninterested in No Child Left Behind. It has not been even a midlevel campaign issue this year. But it is due to be reauthorized, and one of the most important decisions the next president will have to make is what to do about it.

No Child Left Behind is a national version of the "accountability" regimes in public education that swept across the states (including Arkansas when Bill Clinton was governor and Texas when Bush was governor) during the 1980s and '90s. It gives local school districts money, in exchange for their administering to their students standardized tests of proficiency in reading and math. In theory, the states have to get everybody—including, in particular, minority students, whose scores are registered separately—up to an acceptable level of literacy and numeracy. Schools that repeatedly fail to show steady progress face an escalating series of sanctions, starting with having to pay for outside tutoring for their failing students and culminating in being shut down altogether. No Child Left Behind was the domestic equivalent of the Iraq War resolution: a lot of liberals voted for it and have been publicly backpedaling ever since. The No Child Left Behind equivalent of "Bush misled us about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction!" is "It was never fully funded!" This is true, but it misses the more fundamental issue: Should the federal government force the entire public school population to be tested for reading and math proficiency, or not?

We've now forgotten, but Bush used to have a high level of optimism about his ability to reshuffle the deck in American politics and produce a stronger Republican Party. No Child Left Behind represented his abandoning the long-held conservative dream of reducing the footprint of public education, through vouchers and other means, and, instead, accepting that public school is the nearly universal experience of American children. (Its overall market share is not eroding at all.) Bush wanted to position the Republicans as the party that would deliver high-quality, basic-skills-oriented public education, and maneuver the Democrats into either following his lead or opposing him and looking like the party of low standards.



Ron Koeberer

The problem is that No Child Left Behind doesn't actually have tough standards. In order to get it passed, the Bush administration, at a fateful point in the negotiations, agreed to let each state define for itself what "proficiency" meant. Some states, like Massachusetts and South Carolina, used that freedom to set challenging standards for their students. Others, like Mississippi and Colorado, set the bar very, very low. The temptation to do the latter is obvious: if proficiency is defined way down, then the "adequate yearly progress" that No Child Left Behind demands becomes much easier to demonstrate. The most attractive aspect of No Child Left Behind—the reason that, say, most civil rights groups support it—is the idea its name communicates: that schools are going to have to teach every student to read and to figure, or

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else. The law just doesn't deliver on that promise now. In the states with low standards, and the many more with middling ones, students are, in fact, being left behind.

Both presidential candidates have left themselves some room to maneuver on No Child Left Behind, partly just by not talking about it very much. John McCain could conceivably have come all out for vouchers, and abandoned No Child Left Behind as an unwarranted exercise of federal power. He didn't. Barack Obama could have called for eliminating No Child Left Behind, as Hillary Clinton did (although she voted for it in 2001), for liberal reasons: too much testing and teaching to the test; too little funding and teacher autonomy. He didn't. It's safe to assume that no matter who wins the election, No Child Left Behind will not be going away.

But to fix it—really fix it—will require dramatic changes and considerable investment of political capital. Neither candidate has indicated that he has that in mind. There isn't any good way to ensure that students have basic skills, which they desperately need in order not to be left behind in the twenty-first-century economy, without testing. But to start with tests is to go at the problem backward. What schools need is, first, a national standard of what proficiency in reading and math means; second, a curriculum that gets students to that level; and finally, tests tailored specifically to that curriculum. That way teaching the class and "teaching to the test" are the same thing. And the schools with students farthest from proficiency are going to need a lot of extra resources to get them there.

To really fix No Child Left Behind will require dramatic changes. Neither candidate has indicated that he has that in mind.

As it took Richard Nixon to open diplomatic relations with China, it took George W. Bush to make the federal government a real presence in every public school. Now that the government is there, it should use its leverage mainly to create meaningful standards and a national curriculum. Right now it uses its leverage mainly to require tests. To change that, and to fulfill what Congress in 2001 took to be the promise of No Child Left Behind, would be a presidential achievement commensurate with civil rights, Medicare, and Social Security. Let's hope the next president sees it that way. WM

Nicholas Lemann is dean of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, a contributing editor of the *Washington Monthly*, and chair of the magazine's board of advisers.

The Courts

By Stephanie Mencimer

There are few areas of public policy where the impact of the presidential election will be quite as stark as the makeup of the U.S. Supreme Court. The next president could potentially appoint two or three new justices in a single term, giving the winning candidate the opportunity to radically reshape the Court for a generation to come.

The Court's most liberal member, John Paul Stevens, is eighty-eight years old and likely the first to retire. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, another liberal, is seventy-five years old and reportedly would like to step down. They may be joined by David Souter, the sixty-nine-year-old Republican appointee who frequently votes with the liberal bloc. But regardless of who wins the White House, the Court will probably get more conservative. Stevens is a judge from another era, and it's unlikely that someone with his bearings would survive Senate confirmation today. So his replacement, even if chosen by a Democrat, is likely to be to his right. The question will be just how far and on what issues.

Even today, one still encounters the lingering perception that John McCain is secretly more liberal than he appears, and is only bandying about talk of judicial activism to mollify the religious right. It's true that McCain's relationship with that wing of the party is not a cozy one, but it's equally true that McCain is a genuine conservative. He has never voted against a GOP Supreme Court nominee, including Robert Bork (opposed by seven maverick Republican senators) and Clarence Thomas (rejected by two). He has voted 159 times to support George W. Bush's judicial nominees. As Sarah Blustain recently noted in the *New Republic*, McCain has voted on 130 reproductive rights measures during his Senate career, and has sided with anti-abortionists for 125 of them. McCain said in February last year, "I do not support *Rove v. Wade*. It should be overturned."

While the contrast between Barack Obama and McCain on hot-button social issues couldn't be clearer, to focus exclusively on abortion or separation of church and state is ultimately distracting. The Supreme Court hasn't heard a great deal of these cases lately, and this pattern is likely to continue for the near future. The areas where McCain may have the biggest influence include the growing number of business cases on the docket (in which McCain's choice of judges would surely share his own ardent belief in deregulation) and questions of presidential power.

John McCain's Court, in fact, would look almost exactly like George W. Bush's. McCain has said repeatedly that he would appoint justices in the model of John Roberts and Samuel Alito. By the conclusion of Roberts's second term this year, the Court had undergone a historic shift to the right. His Court has significantly restricted the average person's access to the legal system, all but eliminated equal pay lawsuits, destroyed efforts to desegregate public schools, and made the Court an

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even friendlier place for well-funded business groups looking to insulate themselves from liability for wrongdoing. As Justice Stephen Breyer lamented, "It is not often in the law that so few have so quickly changed so much." By all indications, the Roberts bloc would like to change far more.

During future terms, the Court is likely to consider what checks, if any, should be placed on a president's power. Earlier in the campaign, McCain's statements on this subject were fairly moderate, but they have since been belied by more recent pronouncements and a telling choice of legal advisers. Chief among the advisers is former solicitor general Theodore Olson, the dean of the radical-right legal movement. As an assistant attorney general in the Reagan Justice Department, Olson was a zealous advocate of executive authority, writing internal opinions in support of the unitary executive theory and triggering a mini-scandal by issuing sweeping claims of executive privilege when Congress was investigating the Environmental Protection Agency for corruption. (Olson was later investigated by a special prosecutor for allegations of perjury related to the incident, though he was never charged with a crime.) Like the Bush administration, Olson takes an aggressive view of presidential authority, and he is likely to push for more executive power absolutists should McCain win.

Since Olson joined his team, McCain has been more public about his views favoring executive power, especially in terrorism cases. But his legislative record has long been quite clear on that point. McCain was involved with drafting, and voted in favor of, the military tribunals act that allowed the president to prosecute detainees held at Guantanamo outside of the federal court system. This summer, the Supreme Court ruled in *Boumediene v. Bush* that the legislation is unconstitutional, and that detainees held at Guantanamo have the right to challenge their detention in federal court. After the decision, McCain initially noted that while he wasn't wild about the decision, he reiterated his support for closing the detention facility. A day later, he was on record blasting the ruling as "one of the worst decisions in history."

Three of the four votes for the *Boumediene* majority—Souter, Ginsburg, and Stevens—came from justices on the verge of retirement. If any one of them had been replaced with an Alito- or Roberts-style justice, the detainees would have been flat out of luck and McCain's vision would have prevailed.

Elsewhere, a future McCain Court is likely to halt efforts to limit the application of the death penalty, which have succeeded even with the current crop of justices. McCain has criticized those decisions, particularly one written by Justice Anthony Kennedy that banned the execution of juveniles. Alito, one of McCain's model judges, seldom saw a death sentence he couldn't uphold while on the lower federal court. And if Alito is McCain's model, immigrants, whose many cases are making their way to the Court, will also find little mercy from McCain appointees. As an appellate court judge, Alito reviewed the decisions of the Board of Immigration Appeals, which has become notorious for its many incompetent and erroneous rulings. Alito, however, showed the board almost total deference.

Barack Obama is, of course, a former lecturer on constitutional law, and cares deeply about the law in general. He has a clear judicial philosophy with obvious implications for cases involving labor, immigration, race, and discrimination. He voted against Roberts's confirmation because "he has far more often used his formidable skills on behalf of the strong in opposition to the weak," and rejected Alito because "in almost every case he consistently sides on behalf of the powerful against the powerless." And during one of the primary debates, he observed that "part of the role of the Court is that it is going to protect people who may be vulnerable in the political process ... If we can find people who have life experience and they understand what it means to be on the outside, what it means to have the system not work for them, that's the kind of person I want on the Supreme Court."

One of Obama's judicial advisers has said that Obama wouldn't seek to clone any of the sitting justices, but would prefer someone in the mold of Justice Robert Jackson, a Roosevelt appointee and New Dealer who signed on to *Brown v. Board of Education* and later served as a prosecutor during the Nuremberg trials. Jackson is an interesting and unusual favorite. He didn't go to college, but apprenticed in a law firm and attended two years of law school before passing the bar at age twenty-one. One of his most famous opinions helped to overturn a public regulation requiring schoolchildren to salute the American flag—still one of the most widely quoted opinions on issues of individual rights.

But today, Jackson is perhaps most known for an opinion on the limits of presidential power. Obama's views on this topic stand in blunt contrast to McCain's. Obama has promised to restore the right of habeas corpus to terrorism detainees and revoke executive orders issued by the Bush administration that overstep the constitutional bounds on a president's power. In his time, Jackson was an eloquent, if pragmatic, defender of such bounds. In *Youngstown Sheet and Tube Co. v. Sawyer*, the Supreme Court reversed President Harry Truman's seizure of

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steel mills during the Korean War. Justice Hugo Black wrote the majority opinion, and unequivocally rejected Truman's position. Jackson concurred, but offered up a finely calibrated formula of the relationship between the three branches of government, an equation that is still used today. Obama's admiration for Jackson suggests that his appointees would value the system of checks and balances.

Despite what his opponents may say, Obama isn't likely to turn the Court into a hotbed of radical liberalism. I suspect his judges will look a lot like Stephen Breyer, who is liberal on some social issues but has voted quite frequently with the conservatives when it comes to business cases. Part of this is political—Obama would have a hard time getting a modern-day Robert Jackson through the Senate. But my suspicion is also based partly on Obama's choice of legal advisers and his own legislative record.

The University of Chicago Law School, where Obama taught, is a leader in the law and economics school of thought that has been embraced by corporate America and conservative legal scholars. Obama was unquestionably on the liberal side of the faculty there, but it's clear that much of the school's free market bent has rubbed off on him. One of his closest legal advisers is his old University of Chicago colleague Cass Sunstein (now at Harvard Law). Sunstein is one of the more creative legal thinkers in America, and liberal or centrist on most constitutional issues. But he also participated in research on the way juries award punitive damages that was partially paid for by Exxon and used by the company to fight the $5 billion *Valdez* verdict. And as a senator, Obama voted for the Class Action Fairness Act in 2005, a bill that restricted consumers' ability to bring class actions in state court when they've been defrauded. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce spent close to $100 million getting the bill passed over the objections of consumer groups. Of course, choosing a pro-business nominee will also win Obama points with corporate America, whose support he'll need for many of his domestic initiatives—and a possible second term. For all these reasons, the Court's pro-business stance may continue in some areas on his watch.

But make no mistake: Barack Obama's nominees may not transform the bench into the second coming of the Warren Court, but they will be, in every sense, significantly different from judges chosen by John McCain. On the one side stands a sophisticated legal thinker who believes that the Court should intervene with great care to protect the sense of fairness and possibility for all citizens that rests at the heart of the American ideal. On the other stands a man who has shown little interest in the law over the course of his career. When he *has* weighed in, it's been to vote for justices who have supported the moneyed over the less fortunate, the powerful over the vulnerable. In many ways, the choice in November is not just between two very different Courts, but two very different countries. WM

Stephanie Mencimer, a contributing editor of the *Washington Monthly,* covers legal affairs and domestic policy for *Mother Jones* and is the author of the book *Blocking the Courthouse Door.*

How Our Health Care Stacks Up With Slovenia's

By Timothy Noah

"We don't have a health care crisis in this country," Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan stated publicly in September 1993, three days before President Bill Clinton was to unveil his health care reform bill. Moynihan's remark, coming from a member of the president's own party, did a lot more than Harry and Louise to kill off Hillarycare. (It didn't help that Moynihan, who was chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, wouldn't hold hearings on the bill.) The good news in 2008 is that no prominent elected official, Democrat or Republican, would dare deny any longer that we have a health care crisis. The bad news is that over the past fifteen years the crisis has gotten much worse.

Since 1993, the number of uninsured Americans has risen from 38 million to 47 million. Per capita health care spending has more than doubled, rising from 12 percent of gross domestic product to 16 percent. Health insurance premiums have increased at an annual rate typically double or triple the rate of salary increases, yet have bought workers steadily less coverage as managed care plans have replaced virtually all traditional health insurance policies. Remember, back in 1993, when you worried that the government would choose your doctor? Today, your *insurance company* chooses your doctor.

What has this industry-led managed care revolution produced? Well, according to a World Health Organization survey made famous by Michael Moore's film *Sicko,* the United States—with a GDP three times bigger than anyone else's—now places thirty-seventh out of 191 countries in the overall quality of its health care system. That's just a whisker ahead of Slovenia.

The danger, then, isn't that the next president will fail to pass a health care reform bill. It's that whatever bill he passes will fail to address the current crisis in any meaningful way. That outcome is much likelier if John McCain wins the election.

In discussing their respective health care proposals, both candidates tend to focus on the need to increase regulation of the private health insurance market. I think it's too late for that; the insurers have by now developed many, many more varieties of chicanery to deny claims than any government regulator could hope to keep track of, much less prohibit. The question therefore becomes: Which candidate proposes expanding the *government's* role in providing health insurance? Only Obama, who would create a new public health

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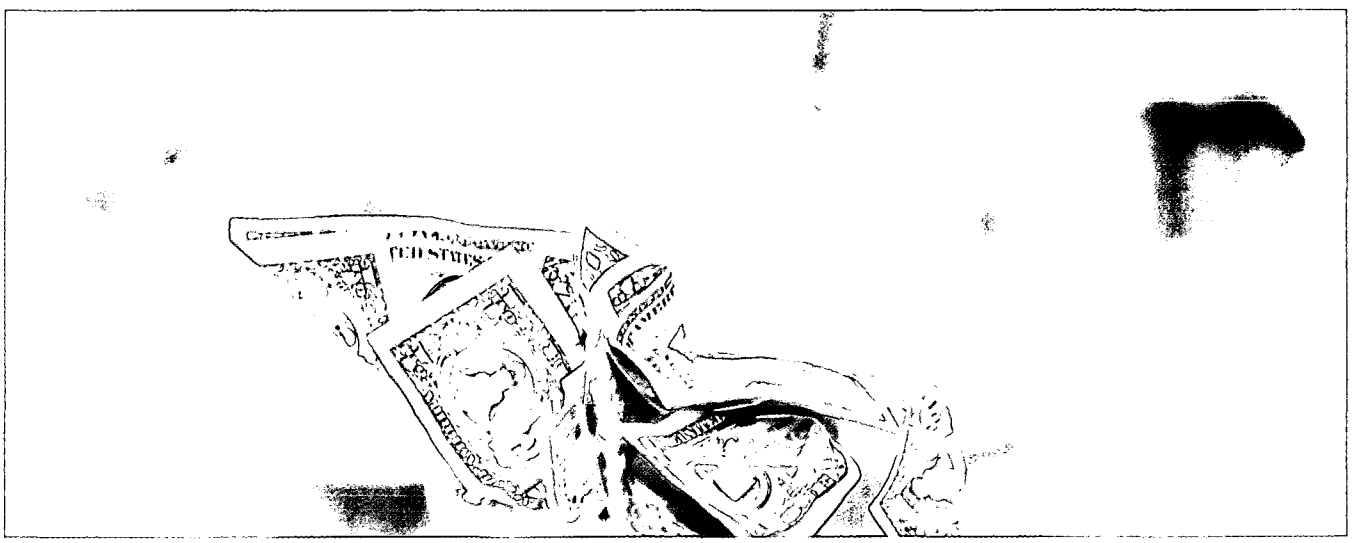
insurance program limited to the self-employed, employees of small businesses, and people whose employers won't give them health insurance. This could evolve—*shhhh!*—into a full-fledged government health insurance program for all, especially if employers responded logically to its existence by accelerating their reduction and/or elimination of health insurance benefits.

The McCain campaign would have you think that relieving business of its role as purchaser of health insurance would be a disaster. McCain health policy expert Jay Khosla recently complained to the *Wall Street Journal*, "To maintain their competitive edge, employers will follow each other down this slippery slope, essentially spelling the demise of the employer-sponsored system." That's a very peculiar complaint coming from a pro-business Republican. American employers' perceived societal responsibility to deliver health insurance is a burden that weakens their competitiveness abroad. Businesses in other nations don't bear that burden; why should they here? The McCain campaign further complains that Obama would pay for his new public program by taxing employers who provide little or no health insurance coverage to their employees. I agree this would be unwise, not because I recoil from imposing new taxes on business, but because it would be politically shortsighted. The only way to achieve health care reform, it seems to me, is to get the business lobby on board—or, rather, to peel the broad business lobby away from that portion representing the health insurance industry, which will almost certainly oppose real reform. The expansion of public health insurance should therefore be paid for by raising the top income tax bracket—above the Clinton-era 39.6 percent, if necessary.

One legitimate complaint the McCain campaign makes about Obama's plan is that it does little to address the problem of medical inflation. That's true. McCain has said that we need to change the way health care providers are paid, and while he hasn't done much to spell out what that means, his campaign staff confirms that he would like to shift doctors away from the traditional fee-for-service model, which gives them an incentive to maximize medical procedures and tests. That's a laudable goal, but one that isn't likely to be realized until the government expands substantially its share of the health insurance market. Otherwise, McCain's health plan is a mishmash of tax subsidies for health savings accounts (which favor the young, single, and healthy over families, the infirm, and the elderly) and a vague pledge to work with governors to help people who can't get health insurance because of preexisting medical conditions. The latter would be achieved at the state level through the establishment of federally subsidized nonprofits that sound to me like a tripartite recipe for public spending without accountability.



Jonathan Kirn

In stating that Obama's health care plan would speed the evolution of a government-run universal health care system, I'm following the McCain campaign's spin much more closely than the Obama campaign's (with the significant difference that, unlike McCain, I'd be pleased with the result). Obama may even have talked himself into *believing* that government would, and should, maintain a severely circumscribed role. It scarcely matters. The public isn't ready to favor a nonmarket solution to the health care crisis, so achieving one is best done quietly, in stages, with the subtlety that Franklin Delano Roosevelt displayed in easing our isolationist nation into fighting the Axis powers.

Don't let this get around. In fact, when you're done reading, please ball this up and swallow. In this tense political year, you can't be too careful. WM

Timothy Noah is a senior writer at *Slate*, a contributing editor of the *Washington Monthly*, and editor of the recently published *Reputation*, a collection of profiles by his late wife, Marjorie Williams.

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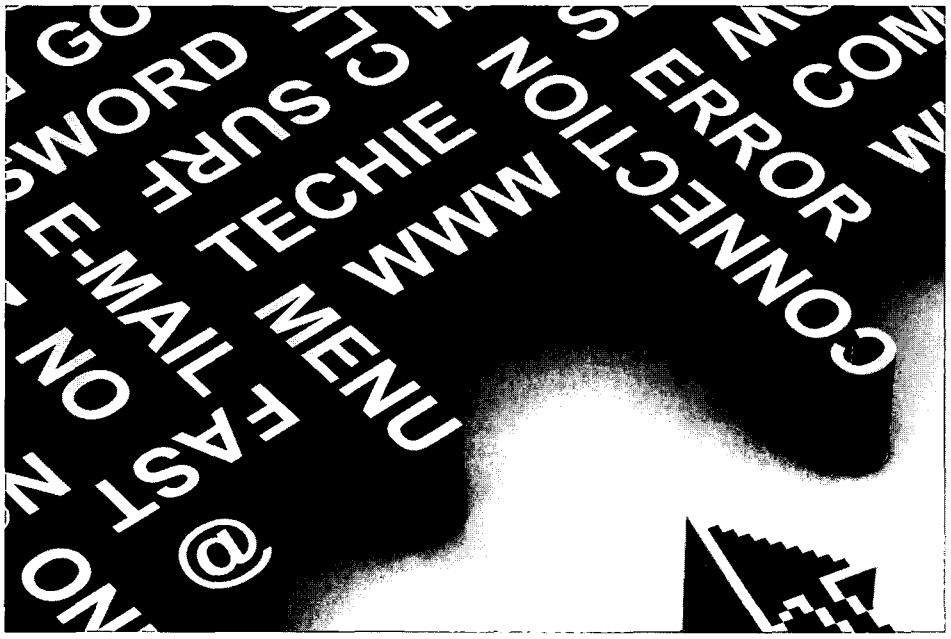
How Fast You Can Read This Essay Online

By Nicholas Thompson

John McCain is an AT&T guy; Barack Obama is a Google guy. And that's one of the most important policy differences between the two.



Think of the Internet as working at different layers. There are all the pipes that go into your home, and then there's all the stuff on your screen—from e-mail to eMule. The telecom companies like AT&T control the pipes; the software companies, like Google, create the stuff.

In an ideal world, both these layers would be sites of great innovation and creativity. But in the United States, that isn't so. The software industry may seem like a team of Gandalfs, constantly producing magic. But the average telecom company resembles Jabba the Hut: it moves slowly and slobbers a lot.

The United States created the Internet, but it's the rest of the world that can really use it. People in Japan are twice as likely as Americans to have broadband connections, and their pipes are ten times as fast. Compared to France, U.S. Internet access is twice as expensive and one-fourth as quick. Since 2000, the United States has gone from fifth in the world to twenty-second in broadband penetration. We have become a nation of buffering YouTube videos.

What went wrong? It's not that telecommunications companies are inherently lazy. Such companies innovate, after all, in East Asia. And it's not just that the United States is a big rural country. That explains some of our lag, but not all. Canada and Australia are thumping us too.

The real reason things went wrong is that we haven't regulated our telecom markets properly. And that's where John McCain comes in.

The problem is primarily the lack of competition among Internet providers. In most places, you have, at best, two choices—the local cable company or the local phone company. And these behemoths know that they don't have to worry about new competitors. With the government's help, they spent decades digging up roads and building lines into everyone's home, creating an infrastructure that no start-up can replicate. Now they sit, fat and happy, neglecting customer service and innovating about as much each year as Google does each Tuesday.

John McCain's culpability is both specific and philosophical. For much of the Clinton and Bush administrations, he chaired the Senate Commerce Committee, overseeing the Federal Communications Commission and the telecom industry. Just before taking the post, he voted against the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the one big effort to solve the problem of anemic competition in the telecom sector. When the act nevertheless passed, he helped to make sure that its main provision for opening the market—mandating that phone companies lease their local lines to competitors—wasn't enforced. Eventually, he, and the people he put on the FCC, helped to roll that law back. France, by contrast, implemented and enforced just the kind of law that McCain opposed. And now the country mocked here for its thirty-five-hour workweek is far more wired than the United States.

As committee chair, McCain also oversaw, and often encouraged, the incredible competition-stifling consolidation in the telecom industry. The country is now served almost entirely by three local phone, four cellular, and four cable companies. In his tenure as chairman, McCain supported nearly every merger. In 1999, he coauthored a bill that would strip the FCC of its ability to veto telecom mergers.

McCain's mistakes derive partly from a lack of technological curiosity (he doesn't use e-mail) and the presence of all

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sorts of Bell guys around him. His campaign manager, deputy campaign manager, Senate chief of staff, and chief political adviser have all worked as lobbyists for Verizon or AT&T.

But more blame lies with his philosophy. McCain espouses what he calls a deep belief in free markets and in keeping government off the backs of business. That's all well and good, except for when a market—like telecommunications—requires intervention in order to create competition. Unrestricted freedom for the big guy often means death to the little guy.

Given McCain's poor record on the issue, Obama could ignore the topic and still come out ahead. But the forty-seven-year-old, it turns out, is something of a geek. He presented a sweeping technology plan early in the campaign that is full of good ideas. He suggested that the government create the post of national "chief technical officer." He proposed taking the money that is now used to subsidize rural telephone use, and spending it on subsidizing rural broadband instead. Not only would people and businesses get Internet access; they'd be able to switch to vastly cheaper Internet phones. Not surprisingly, Obama has won over Silicon Valley. According to opensecrets.org, 555 employees of Google have donated to his campaign, compared to just twenty-six for McCain. When the author of McCain's technology plan, Michael Powell, was pressed to name supporters from the tech world, he came up with the name of one person who's actually written code—and then it turned out that guy didn't even support McCain.

Obama also clearly gets that government has an ongoing role to play in making sure markets work—a fact reflected in the debate over net neutrality. The question here is whether the telecom companies can discriminate over the kind of information that flows over their pipes. AT&T, the other telecom companies, and McCain argue that of course they should. They own the pipes, and in a free market they should be free to do whatever they want. Obama's position is: Hold on a minute. Do we really want the phone and cable companies deciding what kind of software people can use? Do we really want Comcast to, say, decide to start monkeying with your ability to access iTunes.com or Vonage?

Obama, in other words, understands that actual market freedom sometimes requires tough love from the feds. McCain still seems to believe in the chimera of naturally existing total freedom—the freedom for his country to fall further and further behind as AT&T and the other telecom leviathans sit back, ignoring your customer service calls and just watching the $90 monthly checks roll in. WM

Contributing editor **Nicholas Thompson** is a senior editor at *Wired* and a fellow at the New America Foundation.

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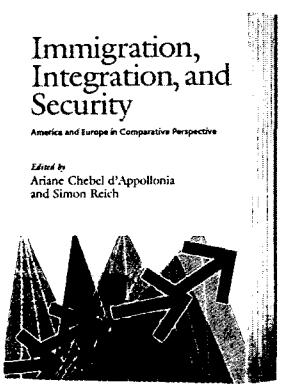

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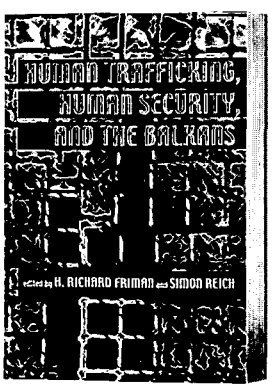

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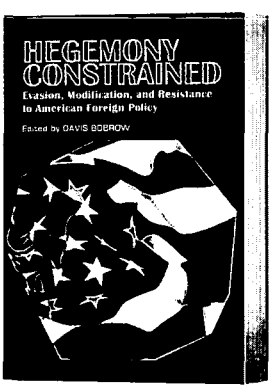

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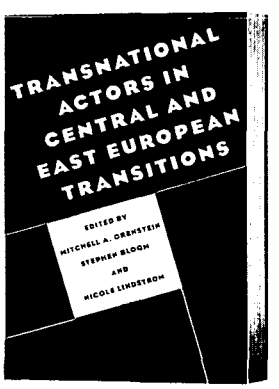

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The Plug-in Revolution

A grand plan for America's energy woes.

By Jeffrey Leonard

My physician friends often complain that they can never escape the demands of their profession. No matter where they go—whether it's on vacation or to their kid's soccer game—people inevitably come up seeking advice on their bad backs or their parent's Alzheimer's.

These days, I understand their complaint a little better. For the past two decades, I've run a private equity firm in Washington, D.C., that invests in clean energy. My counsel has rarely been sought at local cocktail parties (and that's been fine by me). But that changed when the price of oil skyrocketed. Now it seems as if everyone I meet, from taxi drivers to U.S. senators, wants to discuss energy policy with me.

The funny thing is, most of the senators are no more up to speed than the taxi drivers. And at least the cabbies listen.

So what do I tell people?

Well, the good news is that voters and politicians are finally awake to the energy problem. It's especially encouraging that the debate is focusing on the most dangerous part of the energy supply chain: foreign oil. This is a case where the conventional wisdom is true. Our addiction to imported crude threatens our national security by making us reliant on Middle East oil dictators and assorted autocrats around the world. It is also ruinously expensive to maintain, costing nearly a trillion dollars a year at current prices. This seriously exacerbates our trade deficit, nearly four-fifths of which can be linked to oil imports. Finally, our use of oil is environmentally destructive. The oil we put in our cars is responsible for more than a third of America's greenhouse gas emissions. This prevents us from properly tackling the biggest environmental challenge facing the country and the planet: climate change.

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So an important message to politicians is that oil has three huge strikes against it: it's a security threat, an economic threat, and an environmental threat. This is far worse than the cumulative rap on any other major source of energy. For example, Al Gore is right that coal is bad for global warming, but from a national security or balance-of-payments perspective coal stands up well. And while politicians like to pretend that "oil" can be distinguished from "foreign oil," in practice dependence on one kind of oil means dependence on the other. We can drill all we want to here in the United States, but we'll only ever meet a fraction of our demand, since we use a quarter of the world's oil production but possess—at best—only 3 percent of the total reserves.

The bad news is that none of the current energy plans being debated in Washington or presented by the presidential campaigns adds up to sound long-term policy for dealing with the energy challenges facing the U.S. Most of the supposed grand solutions turn out to be half-baked schemes that pander to voters and vested interests. John McCain argues for more drilling in America. Barack Obama favors more subsidies for ethanol. Oilman T. Boone Pickens advocates retooling cars to run on compressed natural gas. These and many other big energy plans have at least one thing in common: they involve a multiyear, massive-spending, government initiative that will set America on the path toward displacing foreign oil with some kind of domestically produced liquid fuel. That may seem like a sensible idea, but in fact it merely postpones, and therefore makes more costly and wrenching, the energy transition that I—and many other industry leaders I talk with—believe will save America.

In the film *The Graduate*, Walter Brooks famously gives Dustin Hoffman a one-word piece of career advice: "Plastics." At the risk of sounding similarly glib, let me nevertheless suggest a one-word answer to our multifaceted energy problems: electrification. The basic idea is very simple. Over the next few decades, government policies should advance the aim of replacing oil and most other liquid fuels with electricity. It should also ensure that the way we generate electricity gets steadily greener and more efficient. Since about three-quarters of our oil goes into our cars, this means favoring policies that will encourage phasing out the internal combustion engine in favor of the electric engine—a direction in which many automakers are already headed. Electrification as a rallying cry for American energy policy isn't perfect, but in my view it's the best and perhaps only way to get us to a clean and secure energy future.

The Logic of Electricity

If you live in a typical home, your domestic life is already centrally dependent on one source of energy—electricity. You have a number of electrical appliances you simply plug into wall outlets. You can move these machines from room to room, house to house, or city to city. All over the nation, electrical outlets work the same way. But imagine for a second that each of your appliances instead relied on a distinct source of energy. Suppose you had to load your computer with coal, your television with kerosene, and your vacuum cleaner with natural gas. That sounds like utter mayhem, since we take the standardization of power sources for granted. And yet, not long ago, people purchased kerosene for their lamps, coal for their stoves, and oats for their horses. The movement toward making machines reliant on electrical power has always gone hand-in-hand with progress.

But we don't think of our cars this way. Of course, for the past hundred years, in a world where petroleum has been abundant and cheap, the fact that the transportation sector hasn't made the electricity transition hasn't seemed problematic. The energy and transportation industries have done what they could to keep our cars frozen around oil technology. It's no wonder that government policies have been aimed primarily at making internal combustion engines more efficient and eco-friendly rather than at changing something more fundamental. You'd hardly guess that electric motors are far more efficient users of energy than internal combustion engines.

John McCain wants to drill more in America. Barack Obama favors more subsidies for ethanol. Neither candidate's energy plan adds up to a long-term solution to our energy problems.

Today, even when we speak of moving beyond oil, the conversation turns to other liquid fuels—such as ethanol or natural gas. This is a bit like reacting to a paraffin shortage by switching over to kerosene, even though each day is bringing breakthroughs on the incandescent lightbulb. The new national commitment to produce thirty-six billion gallons of biofuels in America by 2022, as mandated by the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, is less about stimulating the transportation technologies of the future than about protecting the interests of those who wish to perpetuate the past. The plan put forward by T. Boone Pickens to remove natural gas from the produc-

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tion of electricity and use it to fuel automobiles would just swap our dependence on oil for dependence on another fossil fuel. This would force us to spend billions of dollars building out new gas infrastructure, and it would inevitably drive up the price and require us to import more liquefied natural gas. We'd also risk depriving our electrical grid of one of its most precious resources—because natural gas is the primary source of "peak load" power production available to the system. So it's a lot more sensible to preserve natural gas as a source for electricity and heat in our homes and to use electricity for vehicles instead.

Moving from oil to natural gas or ethanol is a bit like reacting to a paraffin shortage by switching to kerosene, and ignoring breakthroughs on the incandescent lightbulb.

Because our national policy has been biased toward liquid fuel for so many years, it's easy to forget how liberating a bias toward electricity would be. Electrons, which travel through power lines, are far easier to transport than are dangerous, corrosive liquids, which require trucks or pipelines. (Incidentally, existing pipelines could not accommodate ethanol, which would corrode them.) Since electricity can be generated from many "homegrown" sources—coal, natural gas, wind power, solar energy, hydropower, nuclear power, fuel cells, and, eventually, perhaps fusion and other sources—it's tremendously flexible. This makes things easier for policymakers, too. Most important of all is that it helps us to phase out one of the major sources of energy—and headaches—in our economy today: oil.

Trend to Electricity

To see how a smarter use of electricity in our cars, starting in urban areas, might work, take a look at London, where drivers are purchasing electric cars in order to avoid a fifteen-dollar-a-day "congestion fee" required of ordinary motorists. Many drivers in the city now own two cars: an electric one for day-to-day local use, and a traditional oil-burning one for long-distance driving. They use the EV for the ordinary short trips in town and take the big car out for the weekend trip up the motorway. Other European cities are following the London example.

I recently started driving an electric car made by a firm that my company invests in. I thought I'd keep driving my gas-powered hybrid Toyota Camry about half the time, but in reality I've been using it only about a fifth of the time. My electric car has taken over. It uses lead acid batteries and has a range that is short by American standards—forty to fifty miles per charge—but I use it whenever I'm traveling inside the Beltway (as long as I'm not transporting my son's cross-country team). Fueling it is easy: I plug the car into my 110-volt home outlet in my garage at night or the 220-volt charging bay in our company parking garage. The cost is about two cents per mile—compared to my hybrid Camry, which at thirty-five miles a gallon still costs me about ten cents a mile. Everywhere I drive, people stop to ask me about it, excited by the idea that they, too, could have an electric car choice in the not-too-distant future.

Electric cars are also getting better and better. Hundreds of millions of dollars of new investments from the private sector are streaming into the electric car sector, leading to improved battery technologies, drivetrains, controllers, and advanced energy management systems. I have no doubt that within a few years EVs will be the major growth segment of the automotive industry. With even a gentle push from Washington, electric vehicles—starting with small, city-oriented cars, delivery vans, and cabs in the next several years—could expand into the mainstream transportation sector of the United States and grow to 25 percent or more of all vehicles by 2020.

To start with, our focus should be on cities. Put incentives in place so that cities make the transportation infrastructure friendly to electrification—like installing power lines for trolleys and electric buses or adding charging stations to public parking garages. Make electric cars available to commuter rail passengers so that people can drive the two or three miles back and forth from their house to the station. Even modest steps like these would go a very long way toward making the urban transportation system in America predominantly electric in a few short years.

I should add that the use of electricity as the primary energy source in transportation is hardly new. Urban light rail and bus systems in most major cities of Europe and Japan have long been electrified. Russia completed the fully electrified Trans-Siberian Railroad a few years ago. If we wanted to make it happen, American freight and passenger railroads could run all-electric with as little as a decade of additional investment. The problem has been will, not way.

Fixing Up, Cleaning Up, and Producing Enough

Now, I don't mean to suggest electrification is perfect or easy. We currently rely on an aging, outmoded electrical

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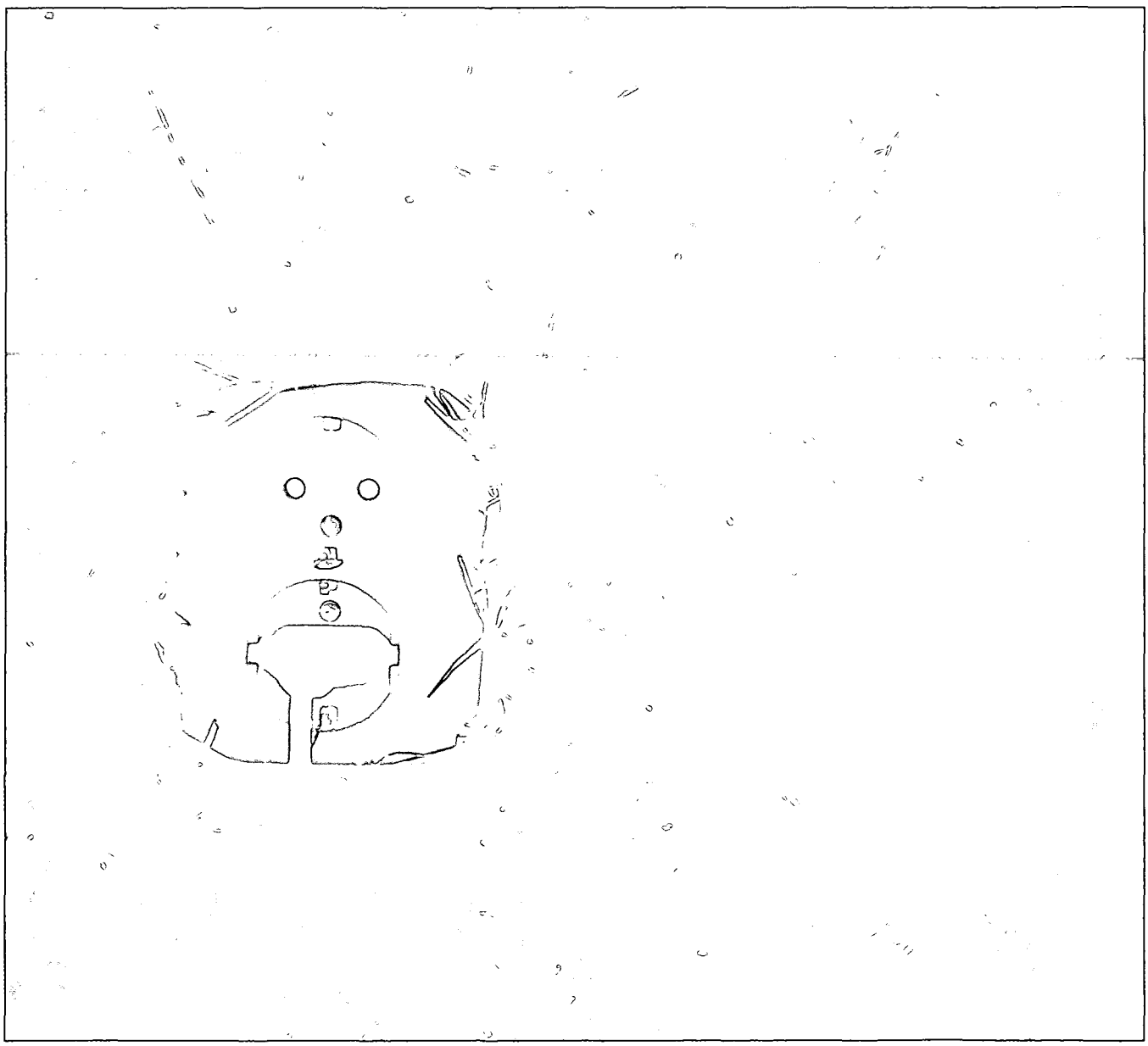
grid that is stretched to the limit, and our utility companies are part of a Byzantine patchwork of regulated monopolies that have few incentives to innovate or modernize. So the physical infrastructure for electrification is not yet in place. Moreover, the greater our dependence on the electrical system, the greater the effect of disruptions to it will be. Severe weather and natural disasters, terrorist attacks, or even just small technical perturbations can ripple into major outages. Experts estimate that 60 percent of our current equipment on the electrical transmission grid is so antiquated that it needs to be replaced in the coming decade.

But these challenges present the opportunity to modernize the entire electrical grid. New "Smart Grid" technologies will allow households and utilities to measure real-time electricity use and control electrical devices in our homes remotely. Advanced IT systems and physical monitoring will better safeguard the grid from natural disruptions or deliberate attacks.

By gradually eliminating petroleum fuels in transportation, we can also begin to tackle the other major threat posed by use of fossil fuels: global climate change. Targets can be set for steadily reducing the carbon footprint of the national electricity generation and transmission system. Of course, adding more wind farms, solar electric panels, and geothermal generation systems will help make the electricity system more carbon-neutral. But equally important will be the technological progress on the dirty side of the business: the use of coal and nuclear power. Currently, more than 50 percent of American electricity



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comes from coal-fired power plants (which emit conventional pollutants and greenhouse gases), and 20 percent comes from nuclear power (which still has serious radioactive-waste problems).

Regrettably, coal cannot be eliminated as a fuel for electricity generation too rapidly, because it still supplies too large a share of our generating capacity. (Politicians know that the public won't tolerate "brownouts" of the sort California experienced in 2001, much less blackouts.) In fact, we will have to maximize energy production from non-oil-based sources if we're to be successful at making up for what we lose by cutting out oil. But by imposing carbon taxes, cap-and-trade programs, and other regulatory mechanisms, we can force power companies either to clean up their coal emissions—through carbon sequestration or other technologies—or, over time, to replace their coal-fired facilities altogether with plants that run on cleaner alternative fuels.

As a rallying cry for American energy policy, electrification isn't perfect—but it's the best and perhaps only way to get us to a clean and secure energy future.

The Messy World of Politics

There's one more advantage to electrification: Washington can keep misbehaving. Electricity is a political winner. It spares government from having to play God in the marketplace by declaring today which technologies will prevail in the marketplace tomorrow. It also allows for many forms of generation, so nearly every energy lobby apart from big oil would embrace a move to greater electrification and scramble to get a cut of potential windfalls. Automakers know that the electric car is the way forward, so few would be likely to lobby against incentives geared toward its development—especially if Washington threw some pork in Detroit's direction. And electrification doesn't require serious sacrifice from the public. Being flexible, a policy bias for electrification also would allow politicians to keep wasting public funds on local pet programs—which they will do unless thwarted by the veto pen. If, say, Senator John Thune of South Dakota wants to throw money at converting ethanol to electricity, a plan like this wouldn't stop him. You pick your battles.

As luck would have it, then, electrification is politically attractive for the same reason it's smart as policy: it's flexible. Policymakers don't need to settle on some specific resource or "favorite fuel" in order to make electrification work. They can allow the free market, conditioned by the regulatory process, to determine the mix of generation sources many decades into the future.

There's one more essential reason for Washington to get behind the electrification wave: the survival of the American car industry depends on it. American car companies know how to build electric vehicles. But they are still behaving as if flex-fuel vehicles are the dominant technology of the future. If this continues, Japanese and European carmakers, who see flex fuels as a dead-end technology, will leave us far behind. Recently, one Japanese car official told me that he considered hybrids a "cul de sac," a diversion from the path to the true electric car world of the future. Even "plug-in" hybrids are getting to be yesterday's news. The Big Three American automakers are asking for $25 billion in new government loan subsidies to retool their factories to make the competitive car of the future. If they stick with flex-fuel or internal combustion engines, they will be out of business in a decade—or back with their hand out. (The Pickens plan, which would require Detroit to retool its cars to run on compressed natural gas, would lead to the same problem.)

Let me say one last thing: simple or short-term policy answers to the nation's current energy problems don't exist. I was a freshman in college in 1973 when President Richard Nixon boldly laid down the following challenge to Congress: "Let us set as our national goal, in the spirit of *Apollo*, with the determination of the Manhattan Project, that by the end of the decade we will have developed the potential to meet our own energy needs without depending on any foreign energy source." Needless to say, this didn't happen. The problem for the past thirty-five years has been that petroleum prices have been low, even if artificially so, and energy policy has failed to account for long-term trends. We must have a forty-year plan, not a gimmicky Manhattan Project–style plan.

No matter how we proceed as a nation in energy use, one thing is certain: the era of cheap, abundant petroleum—the cornerstone of the twentieth-century American way of life—is over. Prices may fall again somewhat, but they will never be what they once were. This is a critical moment, and we'll need a strategy to guide us through what will be a rough transition. As we attempt to curb our addiction to oil, electricity is there for us, and it's the best asset we have in meeting what, in the coming decades, will be the most urgent challenge facing our country. WM

Jeffrey Leonard is CEO of the Global Environment Fund, a private equity firm founded in 1990. He is the author of five books and numerous articles on issues relating to energy, the environment, and economics.

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The Grand Bargain

Five presidents have treated Iran as a threat. The next needs to think of it as an opportunity.

By Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett

In the rhetoric of many American politicians and commentators, the Islamic Republic of Iran is portrayed as an immature, ideologically driven regime that does not think of its foreign policy in terms of national interests. Apocalyptic scenarios have been advanced about a millennially inclined Iranian leadership using nuclear weapons against Israeli targets, with no regard for the consequences, effectively suggesting that the Islamic Republic aspires to become history's first "suicide nation."

Even in less extreme foreign policy circles, the debate about America's Iran policy is reminiscent of a debate over how to discipline badly behaved children. On one side, a hard-line "spare the rod and spoil the child" school argues that this immature polity must be coerced into more appropriate behavior. On the other side, a pro-engagement "build a problem child's self-esteem" camp argues that it is more productive to cajole Iran into better behavior through various material inducements.

This type of discussion is profoundly flawed, for it overlooks an important new reality: Iran's growing strategic importance and confidence in its role in the region mean it is no longer just a threat to be managed. More than ever, it is now an international actor that can profoundly undermine, or help advance, many of the United States's most vital strategic objectives.

That is why the next U.S. president, whether it is John McCain or Barack Obama, should reorient American policy toward Iran as fundamentally as President Nixon reoriented American policy toward the People's Republic of China in the early 1970s. Nearly three decades of U.S. policy toward Iran emphasizing diplomatic isolation, escalating economic pressure, and thinly veiled support for regime change have damaged the interests of the United States and its allies in the Middle East. U.S.-Iranian tensions have been a constant source of regional instability and are increasingly dangerous for global energy security. Our dysfunctional Iran policy, among other foreign policy blunders, has placed the American position in the region under greater strain than at any point since the end of the Cold War. It is clearly time for a fundamental change of course in the U.S. approach to the Islamic Republic.

By fundamental change, we do not mean incremental, step-by-step engagement with Tehran, or simply trying to manage the Iranian challenge in the region more adroitly than the Bush administration has done. Rather, we mean the pursuit of thoroughgoing strategic rapprochement between the United States and Iran: the negotiation of a U.S.-Iranian "grand bargain." This would mean putting all of the principal bilateral differences between the United States and Iran

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on the table at the same time and agreeing to resolve them as a package.

Prior to George W. Bush's presidency, a diplomatic opening with Iran was at least intermittently viewed by the Clinton and first Bush administrations as falling in the "nice to have" category—a desirable prospect, but not essential for American interests. For the president who takes office in January 2009, strategic rapprochement with Tehran will fall into the "must have" category. Iran's location—in the heart of the Persian Gulf and at the crossroads of the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia—was always strategically important. It's more so now that we are bogged down in two ground wars in countries along its borders.

Iran's oil and gas resources have also heightened its strategic importance. For more than a decade, the United States has been successful in its efforts to keep European energy companies out of the Iranian upstream—that is, out of the discovery and production of crude oil and natural gas—with the effect of limiting Iran's rates of oil and gas production. This policy amounts to declaring that the world's second-largest proven reserves of conventional crude oil and the world's second-largest proven reserves of natural gas should stay in the ground until Washington decides otherwise. Such a position might have been bearable (if shortsighted) in the 1990s, when energy prices were low and the adequacy of global supplies was not an immediate concern. Today, it is profoundly irresponsible.

An Obama or McCain administration must try to get Iran to work with us, rather than against us, whenever and wherever possible. This cannot be achieved by trying to coerce Tehran into near-term (and imminently reversible) concessions.

The lack of new European investment in Iran will, among other things, delay Iran's emergence as an exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG). But, from a more strategic perspective, U.S. policy is leaving the field open for increasingly capable Chinese, Russian, and other non-Western energy companies to take the lead in helping Tehran develop its hydrocarbon resources. This point was graphically underscored in July, when, less than a week after the French "supermajor" oil and gas company Total announced that it was withdrawing from a major LNG project in Iran, the CEO of Russia's state-controlled Gazprom, the world's largest natural gas company, met with Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Tehran to sign a new memorandum of understanding and restate Gazprom's interest in helping Iran with several major upstream projects. While Iranian officials readily acknowledge that this is not an "optimal" approach, they also say that they cannot "wait on the West" indefinitely.

An expanding Russian role in the Iranian upstream would be especially problematic from a U.S. and European perspective. Whereas Chinese, Indian, and Malaysian companies investing in Iranian energy projects have a clear interest in increasing the supply of oil and gas to international energy markets, Russia's state-owned energy companies have an interest in limiting and controlling the growth of hydrocarbon supplies to key global and regional markets. This plays directly into Moscow's ambitions to "coordinate" the growth of global gas supplies with other important gas producers, including Algeria, Libya, and Venezuela, thereby increasing the strategic leverage of Russia's own exports. In particular, limiting Iran's options for exporting natural gas to pipelines would help consolidate Russia's increasingly dominant supplier role in European energy markets.

The current U.S. policy debate over Iran not only glosses over these strategic realities, but also betrays an ignorance of how the country's view of its own security has changed over recent decades. Since the death of Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989, Iran has been increasingly capable of defining its national security and foreign policy in terms of national interests. While it may not be easy for some Americans to acknowledge, most of those interests are perfectly legitimate—to be free from the threat of attack or interference in Iran's internal affairs and to have the political order of the Islamic Republic accepted by the world's most militarily powerful state as Iran's legitimate government.

As Americans, we may not like some (or many) of the strategic and tactical choices that the Iranian leadership has made in pursuing these interests—its extensive links to a multiplicity of political factions and associated armed militias in Iraq, its support for groups like Hezbollah and Hamas that the U.S. government designates as terrorist organizations, or its pursuit of nuclear fuel cycle capabilities. These choices work against U.S. interests—and, on some issues, antagonize American sensibilities. They are not, however, irrational, particularly in the face of what many Iranian elites believe is continuing hostility from their neighbors as well as the United States to the Iranian revolution and the political order it generated.

These deficiencies in the U.S. policy debate over Iran lead some to focus on military options and "regime change" as the most appropriate strategic response to the Iranian challenge. We believe that such a course would actually undermine America's ability to get Iran to change its policies. Among other things, U.S. military action against Iran would almost certainly prompt Tehran to accelerate its nuclear program and other problematic activities, with even broader support from the Iranian people.

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Defining the Goal

Against this backdrop, the rationale for a new U.S. policy toward Iran seems almost self-evidently obvious: to engage the Islamic Republic, on the basis of its interests, in order to reach a broad-based strategic understanding with Tehran. The goal of such a strategic understanding would be to redirect the Islamic Republic's exercise of its influence to support U.S. interests and policies, rather than work against them.

This was the model that the Nixon administration applied to relations with China during the early 1970s. President Nixon and his advisers recognized and forthrightly acknowledged that a quarter century of U.S. efforts to isolate, weaken, and press China had not served America's strategic interests, in Asia or globally. In an act of extraordinary statesmanship, Nixon redefined America's China policy so that it would serve those interests. Furthermore, he did so when Chairman Mao still presided over the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Republic was going through the Cultural Revolution. While there was a near-term, Cold War rationale for Nixon's move, the opening to China had long-term benefits extending well beyond the end of the Cold War.

The next U.S. administration will need to display the same sort of wisdom and boldness in re-crafting American policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is clearly in the national security interest of the United States—and in the interest of America's regional allies—for the next U.S. administration to try to get Iran to work with us whenever and wherever possible, rather than against us. This cannot be achieved by trying to coerce Tehran into near-term (and imminently reversible) concessions. Rather, the only way to achieve this is by entering into comprehensive talks with the Iranians without preconditions, with the goal of resolving bilateral differences, normalizing bilateral relations, and legitimizing a significant and positive Iranian role in the region. That is the essence of the "grand bargain" approach.

Détente Won't Do

Some proponents of U.S.-Iranian engagement argue that the level of hostility and divergence of interests between Washington and Tehran are simply too great to permit real, "Nixon to China" rapprochement. The best that American and Iranian diplomats could do, according to the skeptics, would be to work toward a partial easing of tensions, roughly analogous to U.S.-Soviet détente during the Cold War.

But this is not an effective strategy for defending and enhancing American interests or those of America's allies. Détente, by definition, would not resolve the underlying political differences between the United States and the Islamic Republic. Seeking to manage tensions to prevent outright confrontation made sense as an interim American strategy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union during the Cold War, when fundamental East-West conflicts were not likely to be resolved pending substantial political change in the Soviet bloc and an existential interest on both sides in avoiding direct military confrontation. It is not a workable scenario between the United States and Iran, for at least three reasons.

First, while the United States and the Soviet Union were roughly matched in their military capabilities, the United States is and will remain vastly superior to Iran in every category of military power, conventional or otherwise. Almost thirty years after the Iranian revolution, the Islamic Republic is incapable of projecting significant conventional military force beyond its borders, and would be severely challenged to mount a conventional defense against U.S. invasion. Absent a broader strategic understanding with Washington, Tehran would continue to assume and act as if the ultimate objective of U.S. policy toward Iran were the overthrow of the Islamic Republic.

Nearly three decades of diplomatic isolation, escalating economic pressure, and thinly veiled support for regime change in Iran have damaged the interests of the United States and its allies in the Middle East.

Second, in an atmosphere of ongoing uncertainty about America's ultimate intentions toward the Islamic Republic, Iranian leaders would continue working to defend their core security interests in ways that are guaranteed to provoke the United States. Candid conversations with Iranian officials confirm what long observation of Iranian policies strongly suggests: lacking significant conventional military capabilities, Iran pursues an "asymmetric" national security strategy. This strategy includes the use of proxy actors—political, paramilitary, and terrorist—in neighboring states and elsewhere, to ensure that those states will not be used as anti-Iranian platforms, providing Tehran a measure of strategic depth it otherwise lacks. Iran's asymmetric strategy also includes developing unconventional military capabilities (missiles, chemical weapons, and at least a nuclear weapons option). No U.S. administration, of either party, would be able to sustain détente with Iran as it pursues such policies.

Third, U.S.-Iranian détente would not forestall the increasingly serious costs that will accrue to America's strategic position in the absence of more fundamental improvement in U.S.-Iranian relations. Simply put, the next U.S. administration will not be able to achieve any of its high-profile policy goals in the Middle East—in Iraq, Afghanistan, or the Arab-Israeli arena—or with regard to energy security without put-

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ting U.S.-Iranian relations on a more positive path. And that requires more than détente.

Incrementalism and Its Discontents

Other proponents of U.S. engagement with Iran argue that Washington and Tehran should pursue step-by-step or issue-specific cooperation as a way of building confidence and slowly improving relations. But arguments for incrementalism overlook the historical record of U.S.-Iranian relations since the Iranian revolution. While every U.S. administration since 1979 has sought to isolate the Islamic Republic diplomatically and press it economically, issue-specific cooperation has also been pursued by each of those administrations: by the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations in Lebanon, the Clinton administration in Bosnia, and the current Bush administration in Afghanistan. In all of these cases, Iran delivered much—not all, but much—of what Washington asked.

A number of Iranian officials—reflecting a variety of political perspectives and occupying a range of positions during the Rafsanjani, Khatami, and Ahmadinejad presidencies—have told us that they anticipated that tactical cooperation with the United States would lead to a broader, strategic opening between the two nations. But this never happened.

In all of the cases cited above, tactical cooperation between the United States and Iran did not fall apart because Tehran failed to deliver, or because there were no authoritative or pragmatic Iranians to deal with. Rather, tactical cooperation fell apart because U.S. administrations broke it off, usually because of concerns about domestic political blowback in the United States or because of a terrorist attack or arms shipment that might have been linked to Iran. In that context, the repeated imposition of sanctions against Iran by the United States only reinforced Iranian perceptions that the U.S. is not interested in living with the Islamic Republic.

So while tactical cooperation with Iran has periodically provided short-term benefits to the United States, the repeated cutting off of these talks by Washington has shattered confidence on the Iranian side, led to hard-line decisions and policies in both the United States and Iran, and worsened the overall relationship. Without a strategic understanding of where the United States and Iran intend to go in their bilateral relations, there will always be a terrorist attack, arms shipment, or nasty statement that can be used in Washington as justification for ending whatever tactical cooperation might have been going on and imposing still more sanctions on Tehran.

Constructing a Grand Bargain

Pursuing a grand bargain is the only way in which the United States and Iran can untie this diplomatic Gordian knot. Treating each agenda item (the nuclear problem, sanctions, dealing with terrorist groups, etcetera) on its own would essentially require one party to surrender on a very difficult issue, while hoping that the other party would at some point be willing to reciprocate on something else. It would also require each side to refrain from statements or actions that the other would perceive as provocative on issues not immediately under discussion in diplomatic channels. This is hardly a promising or realistic approach.

Pursuing a U.S.-Iranian grand bargain should start with the definition of a strategic framework for improving relations between the United States and the Islamic Republic—something like the Shanghai Communiqué that conditioned the strategic rapprochement between the United States and China in the 1970s. To meet both sides' strategic needs in a genuinely comprehensive manner, a framework structuring a U.S.-Iranian grand bargain would have to address at least three sets of issues:

- *U.S. security interests*, including stopping what Washington sees as Iran's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, its support for terrorism, its opposition to a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and its problematic role in Iraq and Afghanistan;
- *Iran's security interests*, including extending U.S. security assurances to the Islamic Republic, lifting unilateral U.S. and multilateral sanctions against Iran, and acknowledging the Islamic Republic's place in the regional and international order; and
- developing *a cooperative approach to regional security*.

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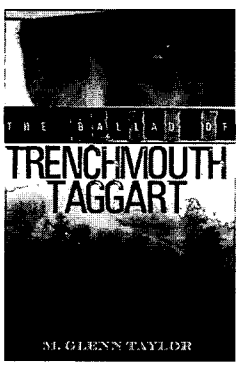

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From an American perspective, an essential foundation for a U.S.-Iranian grand bargain is the definitive resolution of U.S. concerns about Iran's potential pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, its ties to terrorist organizations, its attitude toward a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and its regional role and aspirations, including its posture toward Iraq and Afghanistan. In other words, Iran would need to clarify its commitment to international security and regional stability.

In this regard, the United States would need the following commitments from Iran:

1. To operationalize its commitment to international security, *Iran would carry out measures—negotiated with the United States, other states, and the International Atomic Energy Agency—definitively addressing concerns about its fuel cycle activities. Such negotiations could build on current efforts by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany (the "P-5+1" or the "EU-3+3," as one prefers) to launch multilateral talks on Iran's nuclear activities.* Also, *pursuant to the agreement reached in October 2003 by the foreign ministers of Britain, France, Germany, and Iran, and Iran's subsequent signature of the Additional Protocol to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, the Islamic Republic would ratify—and, of course, implement—the Additional Protocol.* This formulation leaves open the question of whether it is possible to reach an agreement with Iran over its nuclear activities whereby Tehran would forego any indigenous fuel cycle capabilities. However, at this point, we believe that such an outcome is highly unlikely. It is far more likely, in our view, that Tehran would agree to certain limits on the extent of its fuel cycle infrastructure and to robust international monitoring of its nuclear facilities to provide a high degree of international confidence that the proliferation risks associated with its nuclear activities were minimized. This is one of several issues on which, by failing to move on comprehensive negotiations with Iran earlier, the Bush administration has unnecessarily "raised the price" of an eventual deal.

2. To operationalize its commitment to international security further, *Iran would agree to the negotiation and implementation of similar measures addressing concerns about activities that may be linked to its potential development of biological and chemical weapons.*

3. To operationalize its commitment to regional stability, *Iran would commit to stopping the provision of military supplies and training to terrorist groups, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad, and to press Palestinian opposition groups to stop violent action.*

4. Similarly, *Iran would issue a statement that, in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions 242, 338, and 1397, it is not opposed to a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict or a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This statement would also endorse the Arab League's contingent commitment to normalization with Israel following resolution of the Palestinian and Syrian tracks.* Pursuant to this statement, *the Islamic Republic would commit, as part of an overall settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, to work for Hezbollah's and Hamas's transformation into exclusively political and social organizations.*

5. To operationalize its commitment to regional stability further, *Iran would also commit to working with the United States to ensure the emergence of stable political orders in Iraq and Afghanistan.* Iran, of course, cooperated positively with the United States with regard to Afghanistan even before the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, through the United Nations "6+2" framework. Tehran intensified its cooperation with the United States with regard to Afghanistan and al-Qaeda following the 9/11 attacks, and continued this cooperation until May 2003—when the Bush administration terminated the bilateral dialogue.

From an Iranian perspective, one of the essential foundations for a U.S.-Iranian grand bargain is a clear explanation of the American position toward the Islamic Republic. The United States would need to clarify that it is not seeking a change in the nature of the Iranian regime, but rather changes in Iranian policies that Washington considers problematic. The United States would also need to emphasize its commitment to the ongoing improvement of U.S.-Iranian relations.

In this regard, Iran would need the following assurances from the United States:

1. As part of a strategic understanding addressing all issues of concern to both sides, *the United States would commit not to use force to change the borders or form of government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.* This is the essential substance of a U.S. security assurance.

2. Assuming that U.S. concerns about Iran's nuclear program and opposition to a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict were addressed satisfactorily and that Tehran stopped providing military equipment and training to terrorist organizations, *the United States would commit to ending unilateral sanctions against Iran imposed by executive orders, reestablishing diplomatic relations, and reaching a settlement of other bilateral claims.*

3. Under the same conditions, and to operationalize its commitment to an ongoing improvement in U.S.-Iranian relations, *the United States would also commit to working with Iran to enhance its future prosperity and pursue common economic interests. Under this rubric, the United States would encourage Iran's peaceful technological development and the involvement of U.S. corporations in Iran's economy, including the investment of capital and provision of expertise to its oil and gas sector.*

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4. Assuming that Iran ended its material support for terrorist organizations, *the United States would commit to terminating Iran's designation as a state sponsor of terror and lifting the sanctions associated with that designation*. This phased approach to implementing a U.S. commitment to lifting unilateral sanctions in exchange for the reduction and eventual elimination of a state sponsor's ties to terrorist organizations was used by the United States with Libya and North Korea.

5. To operationalize further its commitment to an ongoing improvement in U.S.-Iranian relations, *the United States would agree to begin an ongoing strategic dialogue with Iran as a forum for assessing each side's implementation of its commitments and for addressing the two sides' mutual security interests and concerns*.

Our Iran policy amounts to declaring that the world's second-largest proven oil and gas reserves should stay untapped until Washington decides otherwise. That might have been bearable in the past. Now it is profoundly irresponsible.

To reinforce their commitments to one another, the United States and Iran would also need to cooperate in dealing with problems of regional security. In particular, U.S.-Iranian cooperation on postconflict stabilization in Iraq should be the basis for erecting a multilateral regional security forum for the Persian Gulf and the Middle East more broadly. Such a forum would go beyond U.S. collective security efforts in the Middle East—essentially a series of bilateral arrangements with allies like Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf Arab states—to create a cooperative security framework for the region. This framework would function as a regional analogue to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Similarly, renewed U.S.-Iranian cooperation over Afghanistan could be the basis for expanding cooperation on other security issues in Central and South Asia. During their dialogue with U.S. counterparts over Afghanistan in 2001–03, Iranian diplomats indicated their interest in working with the United States to establish a regional security framework focused on Central Asia. Other senior Iranian officials raised such a possibility with us in 2003–04. Unfortunately, prospects for U.S. leadership on multilateral security cooperation in Central Asia have been complicated by the maturation in recent years of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—in which Iran now has observer status. This is another issue on which the Bush administration's refusal to move on comprehensive diplomacy with Iran has imposed unnecessary costs on the U.S. position.

Getting Started

A U.S-Iranian grand bargain is a tall order. The commitments required of each side are not easy. They are, however, what each side needs to do to address the other's core concerns. No other approach explicitly seeks to resolve the most significant differences between the United States and Iran; therefore, no other diplomatic approach will actually resolve those differences.

Based on numerous conversations with senior current and former Iranian officials—including, most recently, with Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki in July—we strongly believe that there is a critical mass of interest in and support for genuine strategic rapprochement with the United States. However, our conversations with Iranian officials also lead us to believe that a new U.S. administration interested in a more positive relationship with Iran will have to demonstrate that, under the right conditions, it is seriously willing to accept and live with the Islamic Republic. In this regard, the advocates of an incremental approach to engaging Iran have a point—a certain level of bilateral confidence needs to be restored.

One way for a new U.S. administration to get started with a redefinition of America's Iran policy would be to affirm the continuing validity of the Algiers Accord, the 1981 agreement that ended the crisis prompted by Iran's seizure of U.S. diplomats and other official personnel in Tehran as hostages following the Iranian revolution. The Algiers Accord includes a provision committing the United States not to interfere in Iran's internal affairs. Every subsequent U.S. administration has in some way affirmed its validity—except for the current Bush administration, which has publicly characterized the agreement as a contract signed "under duress" and hence not valid.

Affirmation of the Algiers Accord's validity by a new U.S. administration would send a powerful signal to Tehran about the potential for substantial improvement in U.S.-Iranian ties. We believe that, in an atmosphere of enhanced confidence, it would be possible for U.S. and Iranian representatives to explore and set down a strategic framework for the reordering of U.S.-Iranian relations. The next U.S. administration will not have a more important foreign policy task. WM

Flynt Leverett, senior fellow and director of the New America Foundation's Geopolitics of Energy Initiative, served as senior director for Middle East affairs at the National Security Council. **Hillary Mann Leverett**, CEO of STRATEGA, a political risk consultancy, is a former Foreign Service officer who served as director for Iran, Afghanistan, and Persian Gulf affairs at the National Security Council. From 2001 to 2003, she was one of a small number of U.S. officials authorized to negotiate directly with senior Iranian officials over Afghanistan and al-Qaeda. A longer version of this article can be seen at www.newamerica.net.

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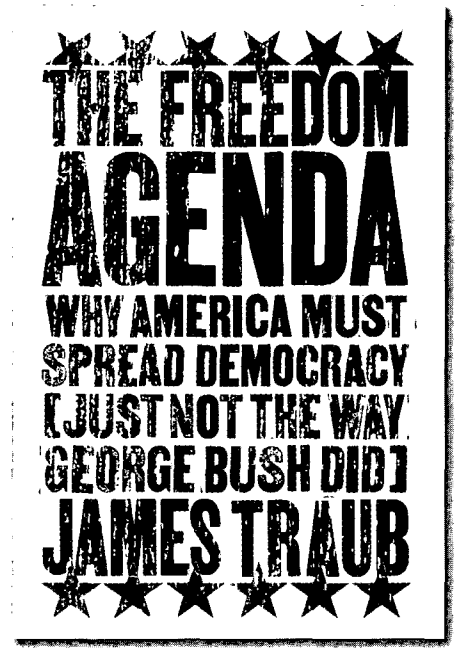
Freedom's Long March

Advancing Democracy in the post-Bush era

By Wesley K. Clark



The Freedom Agenda: Why America Must Spread Democracy (Just Not the Way George Bush Did)

by James Traub
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 272 pp.

Every American soldier who served from World War I through Vietnam and into the 1980s was familiar with the M1911 Caliber .45 Colt semiautomatic pistol. The sidearm was the technological legacy of a nasty little war fought more than a century ago, designed and issued to U.S. forces in the Philippines after Admiral George Dewey forced his way into Manila Bay in 1898. Today the rationale for that incursion, not to mention its aftermath, sounds familiar: America felt an obligation to bring democratic self-government to the Philippines. It was nation building, with all the attendant dilemmas we have so recently rediscovered in Iraq. American soldiers fought against a viciously nationalistic independence movement while trying to promote education, economic development, and a new set of cultural and institutional values. We spent lives and treasure, delivered services and hope, proselytized for new institutions, and committed atrocities.

The Philippines are, of course, an independent nation now, one with its own unique variant of democracy. But as journalist James Traub writes in *The Freedom Agenda*, the most penetrating look yet at the historical and theoretical basis for democratization, the war there was an expensive, messy, and long entanglement for the United States, and we never really changed the social structure that had formed during the country's four centuries of Spanish occupation. We hadn't the heart to uproot it directly, and lacked the resources and time to overcome it.

In short, George W. Bush is not the first American president to attempt to nurture democracies elsewhere in the world, nor is he the first to discover firsthand the perils of doing so. The Bush administration's cowboy rhetoric, its rushed invasion of Iraq and haphazard follow-through, and its stubborn refusal to dialogue with those who disagreed have, in the eyes of some nations, robbed the United States of its moral authority to promote democracy. But, as Traub argues, it would be damaging to allow the Bush administration's clumsy execution to permanently tarnish the idea of democratization. This is in part a matter of national security, which is a function of our leverage and influence in the world: if we retire to our own borders and forego the enlargement of our democratic legacy, we are likely to find ourselves increasingly isolated and adrift in a world beset by other titanic economic, cultural, and geophysical forces. More importantly, without democratization—by which I mean the promotion of self-government in which powers are restrained by staunch guarantees of freedom of speech, association, privacy, and other human and civil rights—we lack a moral basis for our foreign policy beyond self-interest.

In hindsight, it's relatively easy to pine for what we had before 2003: America could claim a principled denial of self-aggrandizement, a generosity of spirit, and a respect for the opinions of others combined with a pride in our own democratic institutions. This had historically given us an authority in world affairs well beyond our economic and military strengths. Reacquiring this influence after the debacle of Iraq is no easy task: the United States is engaged in two hot wars, a new Cold War with Russia, a worldwide

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counterterrorism campaign, and a global economic competition.

Just how urgent is it that other states become democracies? Let's try to learn from experience, Traub suggests. Starting with the Philippines and working his way forward into the twentieth century, Traub illustrates the difficulties and risks of aligning national interests with a particular form of government abroad. In the aftermath of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson tried to internationalize the democratizing impulse through the creation of new countries and the League of Nations. He lacked the health and the power, at home and abroad, to succeed. World War II made clear, however, that dictatorships and autocracies were threats to world peace. This time there was sufficient resolve not only to forge new democracies from defeated Axis powers but also to internationalize collective security in a more effective organization, the United Nations.

Democratization succeeded in Germany and Japan in large part because of those nations' modern, educated populations, which were readied for reform by the demoralization of total defeat and devastation in war. Elsewhere, democracy faced a rocky road after World War II. Eastern European representative governments like Czechoslovakia were subverted by Communism. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, Harry S. Truman's doctrine of aiding states battling Communist aggression complicated matters, too—U.S. allies like South Korea were democratic in form only, which is to say they held elections. The United States changed governments by coup, and "tilted" against a largely democratic India in 1970 in favor of the often-autocratic Pakistan for purely geostrategic interests. Africa went from colonialism to dictatorship, as did some of Southeast Asia. Strongmen, many allied with the United States, came to dominate Latin America.

It was the end of the Cold War that saw a real wave of democratization wash around the world, principally in Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States. In Eastern Europe, which had had a strong democratic tradition in the interwar period, the transition was relatively easy. There was also a genuine will to help from the United States: the Clinton administration was convinced, rightly, that our security would be improved if more nations in the world shared our values. But in Russia, Traub writes, we probably couldn't have mustered the vast resources needed to really impact democratization even if we had fully understood the magnitude of the need. This was another case where the underlying culture—which had long been state centered and never really penetrated by the democratic norms and expectations of the West—wasn't broken. Democratic forms were imposed without the cultural and economic basis for a truly modern, liberal state.

Joe Raedle

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When it came to nation building, the record was similarly mixed. Just as America discovered in the Philippines, it was one thing to bring down the bad old order, but another thing entirely to build something better in its place. Traub correctly points out the difficulties in Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. But the basic motive behind our involvement in those places—and I speak from personal experience—was to alleviate suffering and end conflict, rather than to create glittering models of democracy.

The Bush administration's deployment of democratization as a key weapon in the war on terror was clearly a step too far. It was a fallacy to believe that asymmetric threats couldn't emerge from more democratic states—purple fingertips do not mean the end of terrorism, as we found out to our sorrow in Iraq three years ago. And rushing into elections risked neutering the authority of governments on which the U.S. had relied for support and leadership in troubled regions. It is here that Traub is at his strongest, recognizing the colossal, naive blunder of the Bush commitment to wholesale democratization in the Middle East. As a policy it was simply unworkable, because there were no mass parties or movements in the region that, if boosted democratically into power, would suddenly align their countries with America's interests. In fact, Traub notes, the opposite appears to be the case: mass movements in the Islamic world at this point tend to be fundamentally anti-Western. The result was Hezbollah gains in the Lebanese elections, Hamas gains in the Palestinian ones, and a frustrating start-stop policy of pressure on Hosni Mubarak in Egypt.

In his writing on Egypt, especially, Traub highlights a grave policy failure of the Bush administration that has slid from public notice very quickly. Again, the problem seems to be that the culture was simply not oriented toward individual freedom, the necessary foundation for a truly liberal state with clearly limited government authority. This is not to say, however, that the conditions on the ground in the Islamic world are uniformly hostile to democracy; Traub explores the strange case of Mali, where a surprising degree of democracy has flourished. The combination of factors that have made this possible is instructive: Mali's uniform poverty seems to have created a climate of respect and restraint; the nation has been spared the "resource curse" that has afflicted other African and Middle Eastern nations; and democracy in Mali doesn't have conspicuous American fingerprints on it—that is, elections aren't viewed as referenda on Westernization.

If there is an area of this excellent book that needs more development, it's in the lessons that Traub derives from these experiences and the prescriptions he offers. Traub simply asks us to take democratization on a case-by-case, step-by-step basis, pragmatically, and slowly. But the fact is, I agree with that. There's no one-size-fits-all solution.

The kind of change we want to promote—and that will promote our security—is for nations to work toward limited, pluralistic governments that impose the rule of law but also respect individual rights and freedoms, systems in which the heavy hand of the state is restrained by respect for freedoms of the press, association, and privacy. Without these, holding elections doesn't help us all that much. The National Endowment for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute, and the other nongovernmental organizations that export these political values are useful, even vital, but must be seen in a larger context. It takes a couple of generations or longer to change a culture, as we Americans should understand from our own experience in Reconstruction after the Civil War. There are no quick fixes.

Instead, we must set the example of good government, prosperity, transparency, and tolerance. Everyone won't see it our way. But if we are steady and persistent, and if our policies are fair minded and generally work at home, then we can reach out with scholarships and fellowships, exchanges and visits, and, working ever so carefully, help others achieve what we prize so highly.

Regardless of who takes office in January, American foreign policy will continue to seek a higher, more legitimate purpose than the simple protection of American interests. But a McCain presidency is likely to have a sharper edge in this than an Obama administration. Candidates who speak of strengthening a society of democracies to sidestep the United Nations and expelling Russia from the G8 sound naive and exclusionary. I would hope that an Obama administration would show more tolerance and patience while we built the institutional framework at home and beefed-up teams of civilians abroad to augment the nonmilitary aspects of American foreign policy, including preventive diplomacy and support to fledging democracies. But neither candidate is likely to persist in the simplistic illusion that the act of voting will, in itself, prove a silver bullet in defeating terrorism.

Regardless of who takes office in January, American foreign policy will continue to seek a higher, more legitimate purpose than the simple protection of American interests. But a McCain presidency is likely to have a sharper edge in this than an Obama administration.

So far, in all my travels abroad, I've only had one man tell me that America must do to his country what we did to Iraq. He was a Syrian diplomat-politician in exile. I told him to forget it. We have learned that painful lesson—or at least, I hope we have. WM

General Wesley K. Clark is the former supreme commander of NATO and a former Democratic presidential candidate.

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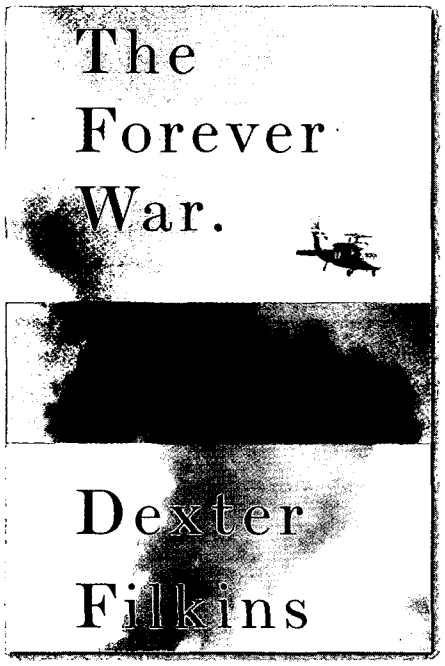
Iraq Bottom



The Forever War
by Dexter Filkins
Knopf, 384 pp.

Dexter Filkins's brilliant memoir of the war's worst years

By Clint Douglas

In *The Forever War*, his memoir of the years he spent reporting from Iraq and Afghanistan, *New York Times* foreign correspondent Dexter Filkins writes about meeting an American officer tasked with distributing funds for reconstruction projects in the early days of the Iraq War. "We've made friends here," the officer says confidently. He is equally certain that he has a good rapport with his Iraqi counterpart, a man named Allawi, who is a provincial minister. The American officer agrees to provide $14,000 to repair a dilapidated dam. But when the officer's back is turned and Filkins asks Allawi what he thinks of the Americans, the minister says, "I take their money, but I hate them. I am cooperating with the Americans for the sake of my country. The Americans are the occupiers. We are trying to evict them." He will collaborate with Americans even as he tries to kill them. "There were always two conversations in Iraq," Filkins writes: "the one the Iraqis were having with the Americans and the one they were having with themselves ... That conversation was the chatter of a whole other world, a parallel reality, which sometimes unfolded right next to the Americans, even right in front of them. And they almost never saw it."

Five and seven years on, respectively, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan bear little resemblance to what we thought they would be when we first launched them, carried on by their own momentum and internal logic. What is most striking in Filkins's account is the complexity and opacity (to the Americans, at least) of these places, and even of the wars themselves. Filkins raises uncomfortable questions about the gullibility of Americans, perhaps including me—as I blundered across eastern Afghanistan as a soldier in 2003, I grew to rely closely on my Afghan counterparts and often considered them reliable colleagues, if not friends. I know that I was played for a sucker many times, but how often was I as oblivious to my environment as Allawi's American "friend"?

Filkins was based in Baghdad from 2003 to 2006, and before that worked in Afghanistan and Pakistan for the *Los Angeles Times*. His memoir encompasses both assignments, but the bulk of the book is about Iraq, where he bore witness to the most violent and anarchic days of the war. The focus on Iraq is in some ways unfortunate, as Afghanistan seems to inspire his best writing. This is a reporter's book, and it shows—Filkins writes exclusively about what he personally saw and did, and who he interviewed. His knowledge of his subject matter is broad and deep, if not encyclopedic. He keeps the editorializing and speculation to a minimum. Refreshingly, he offers no forecasts or suggestions for the future, and fleshes out portraits of Iraq and Afghanistan as they are (or were; Filkins left Iraq in 2006), not as they should or could be. This focuses the writing, which is trenchant and visceral as he describes Iraq's spiral into madness. Ever the good reporter, Filkins allows the many contradictions of the place and the things he witnessed and experienced there to speak for themselves. His language is straightforward and economical, allowing the war to come through with an unfiltered-seeming intensity and immediacy. Most chapters are comprised of a series of vignettes, sometimes related but often not. Although Filkins's tight prose has little in common with the New Journalism of the 1960s and '70s, comparisons to Michael Herr's Vietnam masterpiece *Dispatches* are not unwarranted.

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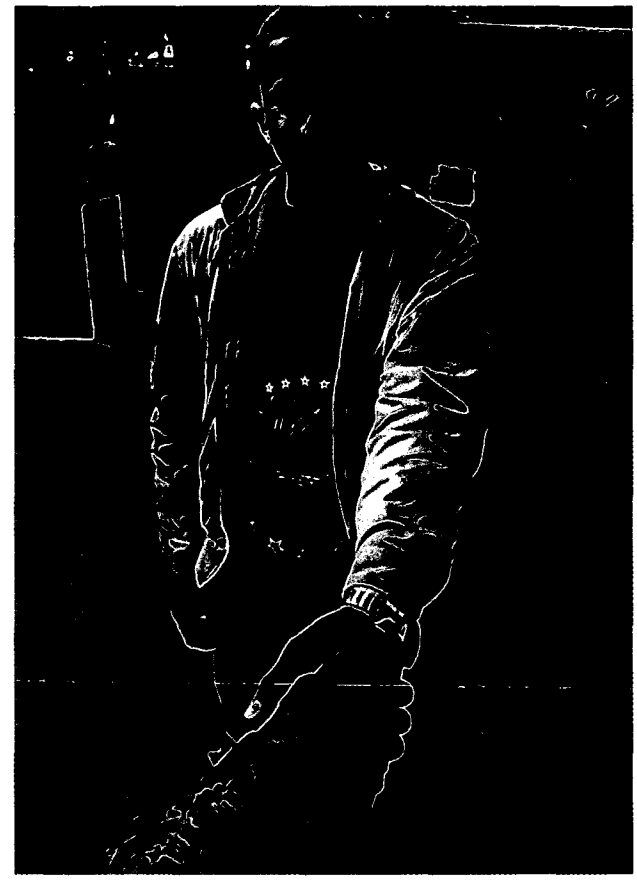
Chapter 1 of *The Forever War* opens in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1998. Filkins is in the stands of the national soccer stadium to witness one of the Taliban's now infamous public executions. A pickpocket's hand is amputated; a murderer is executed by the victim's brother. When Filkins asks the spectators about this form of justice, most of them voice approval, but with little enthusiasm: "'In America, you have television and movies—the cinema,' one of the Afghans said. 'Here there is only this.'"

"Just then a jumbo jet appeared in the sky above, rumbling, forcing a pause in the ceremony," Filkins writes. "The brother stood holding his Kalashnikov. I looked up. I wondered how a jet airliner could happen in such a place, over a city such as this, wondered where it might be going. I considered for a second the momentary collision of centuries." As the roar of the distant jet faded, the man with the Kalashnikov took his shot. "In revenge there is life," intoned the voice from the loudspeaker as the dead man slumped over.

A scant seven years after the fall of the World Trade Center, it's difficult to remember a day when the Taliban weren't our blood enemies. Filkins's account of the public execution reads like a postcard from a more naive era, when the Taliban, of whom we knew so little, seemed almost quaint as they busied themselves with such eccentric tasks as blowing up ancient statues. But they also brought order to the anarchy that descended on Afghanistan and provided some semblance of law and order to a population that had grown accustomed to having neither. Filkins admits a grudging admiration for a Talib he interviews:

> *"The biggest scourge was the checkpoints," [the man] said, "the commanders, the warlords, they would loot and plunder and violate all who passed. Rape and violate the women ... They were a plague on the people." Mohammedi was an old man, with weathered skin and a stringy beard. But he was tough and hard and honest, you could see that in his eyes, and he was straight as a two-by-four. As I listened to him that night in the little room off the hotel lobby, I found myself admiring the old man. Anarchy had taken over, and the Taliban were the only guys mean enough and dark enough to wrestle it back to dusty earth.*

Filkins also understands the root of the Taliban's early, fear-based success. "[I]t was fear of the past," he writes. "Fear that the past would return, that it would come back in all its disaggregated fury. That the past would become the future. The beards, the burqas, the whips, the stones; anything, anything you want. Anything but the past." Afghanistan, in its slide into medieval barbarity, became the laboratory of an unsettled future, a place where "you could see with your own eyes a civilization imploded, and all the new creatures and strange philosophies it produced."



If the complex loyalties of Iraqis were beyond the understanding of Americans involved in prosecuting the Iraq War, in Afghanistan the same thing was true of the simple fact of warfare itself. "They had been fighting for so long," Filkins writes:

> *twenty-three years then, that by the time the Americans arrived the Afghans had developed an elaborate set of rules designed to spare as many fighters as they could. So the fighting could go on forever. Men fought, men switched sides, men lined up and fought again ... On Tuesday, you might be part of a fearsome Taliban regiment running into a minefield. And on Wednesday you might be manning a checkpoint for some gang of the Northern Alliance. By Thursday you could be back with the Talibs again, holding up your Kalashnikov and promising to wage jihad forever. War was serious in Afghanistan, but not that serious. It was part of everyday life. It was a job. Only the civilians seemed to lose.*

If a more accurate statement has ever been written about modern Afghanistan, I'm not aware of it. Anyone who has experience in that country knows that the Taliban are not a monolithic cohesive force, and that the enemies we fight there represent an entire constellation of motives and affronts. It is little surprise that the Afghans' opinion of the soldier's profession is correspondingly low.

In Iraq, even as security deteriorated, Filkins did most of his reporting far from the protection of American guns. He covered the battle of Najaf, when Muqtada al-Sadr's followers rose up and seized the Shiite holy places, from the

Ed Danack

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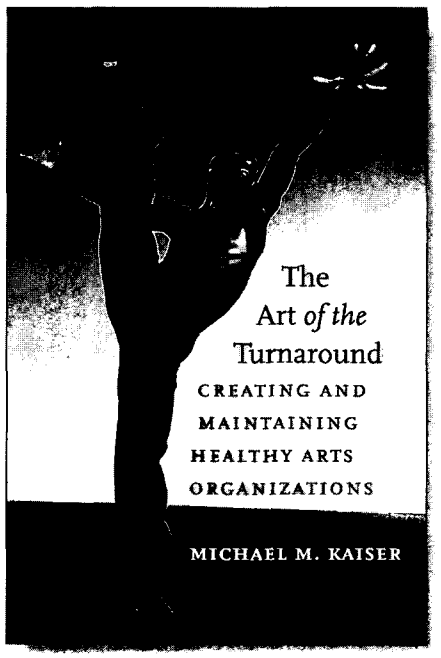
side of the Mahdi army—which is to say that he was with that rag-tag militia as American firepower tore them to bits. (A sharia court almost executed Filkins for his trouble.) His most unique contribution, though, has to be his description of the trials the *Times* bureau went through in order to remain in Baghdad. Piece by piece the newspaper acquired an army and built a castle, complete with guard towers and manned machine guns, even closing down a street in order to dissuade suicide bombers.

Five and seven years on, respectively, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan bear little resemblance to what we thought they would be when we first launched them, carried on by their own momentum and internal logic.

Filkins is not above self-criticism, and is honest about his own failings—such as his egregiously dangerous nightly five-mile runs, which he took at the same hour, on the same route, every night, at a time when every correspondent was a high-value target for kidnappers. Filkins is frank in acknowledging his contribution to the death of an American Marine during the battle of Fallujah, although he wasn't directly responsible for it: near the end of the battle, a photographer who'd accompanied Filkins during the house-to-house fighting needed a picture of a dead Iraqi fighter; one of the Marines who guarded them on this fool's errand was killed. His death has the unnerving effect of implicating not just the reporters who report and package our news, but also those of us who consume it. A war story demands a war picture—war can't be hell unless we can experience some small measure of it.

The one real problem with *The Forever War* is its timing. Filkins left Iraq in 2006, and doesn't write about the troop surge and diminished violence that followed his departure. This is more than unfortunate, as Filkins's intimacy with Iraq would have gone far in explaining just what exactly stemmed the tide and brought the country back from the abyss. Instead, *The Forever War* leaves a Baghdad in ruins. Since his subsequent return to a Baghdad posting this year, Filkins has marveled at the positive changes that struck him as beyond comprehension two years ago. None of this is in the book—and, of course, it couldn't be. I've heard the claim made that the Iraq War was not one war, but many: different phases, different belligerents, different circumstances. *The Forever War* describes the first series of these wars so completely that its author can be forgiven for not getting to what happened next. WM

Clint Douglas is currently blogging about defense and national security on Inteldump at the *Washington Post*. He lives in Chicago.



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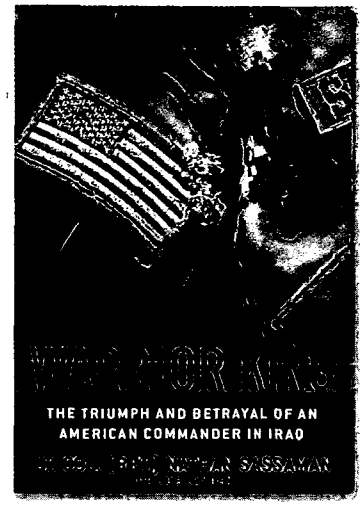
Fight Club

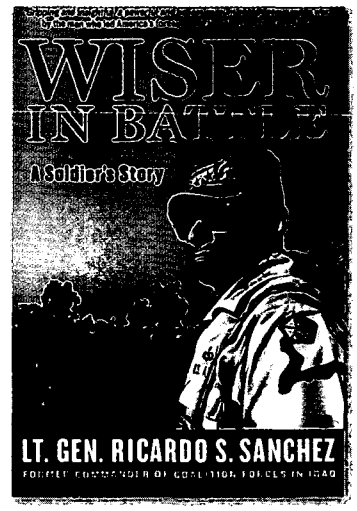
Excessive force nearly lost us the Iraq War. The brass who gave the orders still don't get it.

By Thomas E. Ricks



Warrior King: The Triumph and Betrayal of an American Commander in Iraq

by Nathan Sassaman, with Joe Layden
St. Martin's Press, 320 pp.



Wiser in Battle: A Soldier's Story

by Ricardo S. Sanchez,
with Donald T. Phillips
HarperCollins, 512 pp.

About eighteen months ago, the U.S. Army produced an important new manual on counterinsurgency that, when implemented last year in Iraq, helped American troops greatly improve the security situation there. Retired lieutenant colonel Nathan Sassaman's recent memoir, *Warrior King*, is the mirror opposite of that document—it is, effectively, the anti-manual. And it should be required reading for anyone who is deploying to the war in Iraq, or who wants to know how we dug so deep a hole there in 2003 and 2004.

Warrior King is a blueprint for how to lose in Iraq. Of course, that's not how it is presented by Sassaman, who commanded a battalion of the 4th Infantry Division in the Sunni Triangle during the war's first year. (Full disclosure: I am mentioned, neutrally, in the book.) In Sassaman's mind, he's a winner who understood that prevailing in Iraq meant breaking some furniture. A former West Point quarterback, he tended to see the civilian population not as the prize in the war, but as the playing field on which to pound the enemy.

At the heart of this book is Sassaman's conviction that he knew how to win in Iraq, but was surrounded by softies and cowards. In fact, he really only knows one fairly narrow way of war: "My philosophy (and I still think it's sound) was to crush the ant with a sledgehammer." Or, as he memorably put it to the *New York Times* while he was still in Iraq: "With a healthy dose of fear and violence, and a lot of money for projects, I think we can convince these people that we are here to help them." Officers who disagreed with that, he believed, simply lacked "the will to win."

A lot has changed since Sassaman's time in Iraq. American commanders there have come to focus on the "fence-sitters," the broad middle of the Iraqi population that might be persuaded to support the Americans. Nowadays, U.S. patrols reach out to those people, offering them protection and helping them get essential services such as water, sewer, and electricity. But back in 2003 and 2004 Sassaman was having none of that. In his view, those who were not with him were against him. So when some villages didn't explicitly help his soldiers, he sent loudspeaker trucks to blast "these ungrateful places" with music from—*ha-ha*—the Village People.

What gives the book additional pungency is that Sassaman left Iraq so embittered that he names names as he tries to make his case as clear as possible. This is unusual in a modern American military memoir, which as a genre tends toward extreme discretion. Not here. He calls out, for example, the commander of a sister unit: "Lt. Col. Ryan Gonsalves, who appeased the Iraqis and generally avoided fighting the insurgency to limit collateral damage." Elsewhere, he accuses Gonsalves's outfit, the 1st Battalion of the 66th Armored Regiment, of being "virtual cowards."

Sassaman had a spectacularly bad relationship with his brigade commander, Colonel Fred Rudesheim, who he thought was a wimp. "I neither trusted nor respected him," he writes. Rudesheim repeatedly instructed Sassaman to operate less aggressively and with more care for the population, but Sassaman blew the colonel off: he became insubordinate, and even violated explicit orders about getting clearance before using artillery fire. The evidence Sassaman piles up against himself is so striking that one wonders why he wasn't relieved of command months earlier.

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Eventually, his obvious indiscipline and simple-minded aggressiveness did get him into trouble. After Sassaman's battalion lost two soldiers in 2003, he stepped up the violence. A patrol led by one of his platoon leaders, Lieutenant Jack Saville, threw detainees into the Tigris River, where one allegedly drowned—information appropriately reported up the chain of command by Gonsalves's unit, which Sassaman doesn't mention but may account for some of the animus here. Saville later testified at a court-martial that he had been told to go after certain Iraqis and not bring them back alive if they were captured, another point Sassaman omits. This incident, coming after two men were killed, made me wonder how Sassaman might have reacted if he had commanded, say, the 1st Battalion of the 26th Regiment, which lost an agonizing total of thirty-one soldiers in Baghdad in 2006 and 2007.

Rather than get to the bottom of the Tigris River matter, which was his clear duty as a commander, Sassaman chose to help his soldiers obstruct the investigation. In the end, his division commander, then major general Raymond Odierno, found him guilty of "criminal" action—but inexplicably left him in command of his battalion for more than another year. (Odierno has learned a lot more about counterinsurgency since then, and performed extremely effectively last year in Iraq as General David Petraeus's top deputy.)

Warrior King suffers from odd minor mistakes. Sassaman twice misspells the name of an officer who served in his own division, Colonel David Hoag. He refers to the "503rd Infantry Division" when he means "Regiment." He thinks the Muslim Sabbath is Saturday, when it's Friday. In one small but telling error, he asserts that his boss when he served a tour of duty in Korea was the only Army officer then on active duty who held a PhD in military history. I know of at least five officers who hold such doctorates, and who are so senior they would have been on duty then. This inaccuracy is striking not only because it goes to Sassaman's ignorance of his own service and profession, but because it was precisely one of those soldier-scholars, Colonel H. R. McMaster, who in Tel Afar in 2005 conducted the first successful large-scale counterinsurgency campaign of the war. In explaining his approach to retaking that northern Iraqi city from al-Qaeda and its allies, McMaster, who commanded the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, said to me: "What is immensely important is to lift the pall of fear off the population."

What a sharp contrast to Sassaman, who believed that "we had to convince the Iraqi people that they should fear us more than they feared the insurgents." But then, McMaster knows his stuff. He has been a successful combat commander in two wars, and also wrote a well-received book on the failures of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Vietnam War. His professional expertise, combined with a healthy dose of empathy, showed the way forward in Iraq. His campaign in Tel Afar provided the model for Petraeus's new population-oriented strategy in Baghdad last year.

Tom Stoddart

Petraeus's approach is built around protecting the population, parleying with hostile tribes, and cutting deals with insurgents. When Sassaman saw fellow commanders trying out such tactics, he denounced it as "appeasement." Yet there was ample evidence at the time that his own tactics were counterproductive, turning the population against the Amer-

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icans and, indeed, driving Iraqis into the arms of the insurgents. "We had broken the code on how to win the war, and indeed we were winning," he believes. He never comes to see that he was part of the problem, not part of the solution.

"I'd been a winner my entire life—how could everything have turned out so badly over there?" he asks plaintively near the end of the book. In 2006, long after Sassaman left Iraq, the U.S. Army, led by Petraeus, began asking itself the same question, and came up with the answer that Sassaman never sees.

Warrior King is only the most recent report from the losers in the Iraq War, by which I mean the officers and officials whose skills, strategies, and methods propelled this country to the brink of defeat in 2006. L. Paul Bremer and retired general Tommy R. Franks led the way with two of the dullest memoirs I have ever read. Earlier this year, Douglas Feith, the former Pentagon policy chief, topped them with an even more soporific and less insightful account of bureaucratic infighting, little of it having anything to do with how the war was actually conducted. Scott McClellan, the former White House mouthpiece, popped up recently to announce that the critics were correct all along.

A companion volume to Sassaman's is retired Army lieutenant general Ricardo Sanchez's *Wiser in Battle*, a defense of his time as the U.S. commander in Iraq in 2003–04. He is scathing in his criticism of the Bush administration, but about two years too late to be newsworthy, since it is now widely accepted that the handling of the war from 2003 through 2005 was a fiasco.

Sanchez's volume is another report from the old, pre-"surge" U.S. Army that never really understood what it was doing in Iraq and believed that whatever the problem, the answer probably was more firepower. (I'm also mentioned in Sanchez's book—negatively, as supposedly emblematic of an incompetent and biased media in Iraq.) Sanchez is, however, more self-aware than Sassaman. He has a clearer understanding of what went wrong during his time in Iraq. Most notably, he doesn't just blame civilian leaders, and sees that his army was part of the problem.

Even so, he doesn't really get it either. Sassaman writes, "Force was the only thing that seemed to work ... the only thing the Iraqis seemed to understand." Sanchez comes to a similarly wrongheaded conclusion: "Force seemed to be one of the few things that Iraqi insurgents clearly understood." But these are the voices of ignorance. Neither man seems to understand that when force is the only way American forces can communicate, it will be the only thing Iraqis will hear.

> Warrior King *is a blueprint for how to lose in Iraq. It should be required reading for anyone who is deploying to the war there, or who wants to know how we dug so deep a hole there in 2003 and 2004.*

Another point of congruency in these two tales by losers is that they both slam the Bush administration and the war. Sanchez accuses the Bush administration of "gross incompetence and dereliction of duty." Sassaman is even more emphatic. "Bring the troops home—now," he concludes. "Start today ... It's the right thing to do ... Let [the Iraqis] fall into civil war and fight through this on their own." Given the source, that should make any advocate of leaving Iraq quickly think twice. WM

Thomas E. Ricks is the *Washington Post*'s senior military correspondent and author of several books, most recently *FIASCO: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*.

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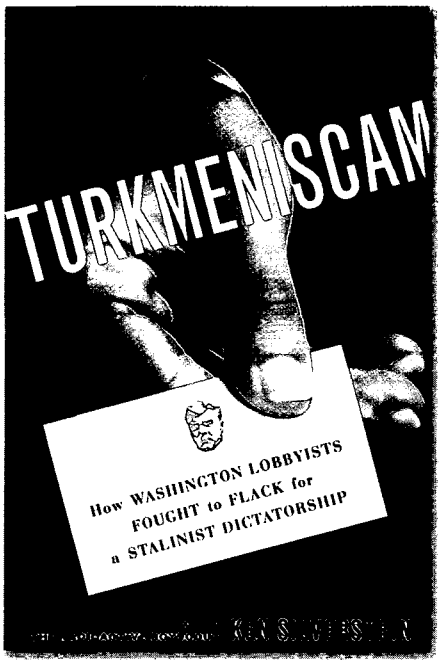

Turkmeniscam: How Washington Lobbyists Fought to Flack for a Stalinist Dictatorship

by Ken Silverstein
Random House, 224 pp.

Sting operations on sleazeball lobbyists aren't what they used to be.

By Jamie Malanowski

Last year, Ken Silverstein, an investigative reporter and the Washington editor of *Harper's* magazine, lit upon a splendid idea: he would pose as the representative of a fictitious British investment firm whose huge holdings in the energy-rich, diabolically ruled Turkmenistan had inspired the company, the opaquely named Maldon Group, to spruce up the image of the corrupt and criminal regime. Using the name Kenneth Case, and bearing as his premier qualification a canny marriage to Maldon's chairman's daughter, Silverstein angled to meet with Washington's wealthiest, best connected—and, on the basis of information and belief—most cynical and least principled lobbying firms, aiming to receive their thoughts about how to burnish Turkmenistan's image, improve its relations with the U.S. government, and obtain better coverage of the country from the news media.

Silverstein's idea, the pursuit of which he first chronicled in *Harper's* and now covers in *Turkmeniscam*, was enterprising, but not altogether new. In 1992, the journalist Art Levine (a contributing editor of this magazine) wrote an article for *Spy* magazine (where I was an editor) on the topic of Washington's greediest, sleaziest lobbyists. As part of that story, a *Spy* staffer posed as a representative of a Bremerhaven-based neo-Nazi group that sought a lobbyist to help the organization rid Germany of immigrants, counter Jewish influence in Congress, and reclaim Poland. These ambitions were too outrageous for most of the lobbyists tested, but a flamboyant and notoriously accommodating figure named Edward J. von Kloberg III—the *von* was purely an affectation, and perhaps everything else was, too—tried to land the contract. "I believe in many of the tenets that you believe in," he said, and unguently pointed to David Duke as a sign that the climate in this country might be turning favorably for their goals. He hung himself with every word he uttered.

Von Kloberg—who committed suicide three years ago by jumping from the parapet of a castle in Rome—never quite recovered from that exposure. The lobbying industry, however, not only endured, but triumphed: shrugging off exposures, absorbing half-hearted efforts at reform, spitting out Jack Abramoffs and Duke Cunninghams for whom enough was never enough, and turning the last decade into the Golden Age of the Earmark, lobbying firms are bigger and better entrenched than ever.

Aiming to show these weasels at work, Silverstein laid his trap. As any fan of undercover capers and behind-the-lines adventures will tell you, the preparation of the story is a big part of the entertainment, and it's fun to see Silverstein equip Kenneth Case with a cell phone bearing a London exchange, a Web site, an e-mail address, business cards, and a credible but decidedly dull backstory (the better to deflect curiosity). Along the way, he explains at length how bad lobbyists in general are, how bad the specific lobbyists he's targeting are, and how awful Turkmenistan is. In thoroughly reported and enlightening passages, Silverstein shows us the growth of lobbying's malign influence, taking us from the exertions of Ivy Lee on behalf of John D. Rockefeller and the Nazis, to the sexual shenanigans of Paula Parkinson, to the depredations of Jack Abramoff and his oily ilk. He piles on justifications that are informative and shocking in their way, but kind of beside the point—all fans of this genre are really expecting is the cold-blooded execution.

Unfortunately, Silverstein is so completely convinced of the guilt of the giant lobbying firms he has targeted that he does not quite manage to convict them with his

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sting. Unlike the *Spy* pranksters who seduced von Kloberg into revealing himself, Silverstein simply does not go far enough. As he himself admits, he was terribly concerned about being discovered. "My nightmare scenario," he writes,

> *was being identified as a journalist while on the premises of one of the lobbying firms. Police involvement was unlikely ... but legal charges (or at least the threat) seemed possible. At a minimum, being busted on-site would have been a personal and professional humiliation ... [T]he prospect of not getting a story and being ridiculed as an incompetent boob was terrifying.*

Apparently all of Silverstein's colleagues at *Harper's* are earnest and conscientious, but what he really needed at this point was someone blithe and irresponsible to egg him on. The reality is that the prospect of arrest was small, conviction nil, and embarrassment—in a profession that welcomes imposters, drug fiends, and certain felons—a nonfactor. Somebody needed to buck Kenny up. After all, you can become a pretty good quarterback in the NFL dinking and dunking the ball down the field, but you become Brett Favre when you're willing to heave the ball. If you're going to complete the bomb, you've got to throw the bomb.

Wary of exposure but still brave enough to go through with the act, Silverstein convinced himself that merely by meeting him and offering a plan, the lobbyists would reveal themselves as the varmints he knew them to be. I'm not convinced they did so. For one thing, Silverstein's overture to the companies was keyed to an all-too-credible lie.

> *[S]oon after [President] Berdymukhamedov's ascent to power via the sham election, I began contacting the lobbying firms ... and explained that we were eager to improve relations between the United States and the "newly-elected government of Turkmenistan." We required the services of a firm that could quickly produce a "strategic communications plan" and otherwise help us achieve our aims, which included arranging meetings between Turkmen government bigwigs and American officials.*

Well, you can't make an overture like that and expect people to call you a liar. It's true that Berdymukhamedov, the strongman with the tongue-twisting name, was elected over five rivals with a Sovietish 89 percent of the vote, and he certainly seems like a nasty, brutish bloke. But blood did not run in the streets on Election Day. (I'm basing this on Silverstein's accounts, but since he points out that the regime closed the Internet cafés, I think he would have mentioned it if they had busted any heads.) Under these circumstances, when somebody says he'd like to improve relations, it's not exactly an indictable offense to have him over for a talk. Perhaps this is a sign of how pervasive cynicism has become, or how all-encompassing the corruption has grown, or what a low sense of outrage I personally possess, but we have a long history of dealing with people who do terrible things. (Weren't the Olympics fun!) We even have a name to use when our morally superior selves engage in trade with the less enlightened: constructive engagement. And often enough, it works. One cannot really convict the lobbyists just because they responded to Silverstein's initial lie.

If Ken Silverstein's Turkmeniscam *does not quite capture lobbyists as nakedly as he wished, it still shows why they should be shooed.*

No—to be convincing, he would have had to lie a lot more. Perhaps Silverstein could have explicitly shared with the lobbyists his concerns about Berdymukhamedov's repressive tendencies, his venality, and his corruption, or prodded them on how they would handle a news report of some atrocity. The lobbyists were clearly aware of Turkmenistan's cruel history. Gregg Hartley, vice chairman of the firm Cassidy & Associates, mentioned that when the firm went to work for Equatorial Guinea three years earlier, Teodoro Obiang was ranked as the world's sixth worst dictator by *Parade* magazine, and now he's no longer even in the top ten, although Hartley admitted, "He's still not a great guy." Responding to Silverstein's question as to whether Turkmenistan would be held to "impossibly high" human rights standards, Barry Schumacher of the firm APCO said there were would be "isolated incidents that look bad, and it's up to the communications company to figure out a way to be honest about them, to react and put them in a proper perspective, to make sure they don't derail the campaign," and then said, "something terrible would be hard to overcome."

Well, these are brilliant bits of double-talk, to be sure, and the lobbyists' all-but-explicit admission that they'd be willing to serve as apologists for crimes that were just short of top-ten-terrible is kind of

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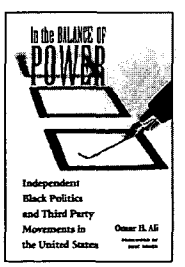

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shocking. But given the careful couching and euphemisms, I wouldn't be surprised if these fellows would have expressed themselves in just the same way in a conference or a classroom or even in an interview. I don't think someone needed to be wearing a wire to hear any of this.

I wish Silverstein had overcome his fear of discovery and had pressed them further. As we learned from *Borat*, people incriminate themselves left and right, often out of only an exaggerated sense of politeness. Indeed, in one of *Turkmeniscam*'s most revealing moments (and perhaps its most hilarious), Silverstein's all-but-silent confederate, the Spaniard "Riccardo," launches into a lengthy bit of gibberish about investment. "Like Ken was talking about it, okay, there's personal return that brings benefits, etcetera etcetera etcetera. In other words, to diversify investments—how do you bring those diversified investments into a direct foreign investment in this kind of political atmosphere such as this country?" After some more of this, Silverstein says Hartley said he "knew just what Riccardo had been talking about."

In such comments resides the greatest value of the book: *Turkmeniscam* is a revelation of state-of-the-art bullshit. The lobbyists all boasted to Silverstein of the influential people they had on staff, the congressmen and senators and administration officials whose numbers were kept on speed dial, the receptions and conferences and studies and op-ed articles they could produce. Any of these could be useful in getting results, none could be guaranteed to produce a thing. As the Abramoff saga showed us, the only guarantee when a lobbyist is hired by a client is that the client will pay (or won't—in which case it's guaranteed that he will become an ex-client). Sure, sometimes it's the lobbyist who counts, but almost always it's the money.

Like payola in the music industry, lobbying is a game for middlemen who have identified a vulnerability in the process and a weakness in its practitioners. But payola is illegal, and its payers get sent to jail. Lobbyists may be reviled in some circles, but they are still accepted, respected, and even envied for their positions of power in the ecosystem of the nation's capital. No one in Washington would sit with the gangster who engages in bribery and payoffs, but lobbyists are the high priests of a holy ritual that produces milk from a golden cow. If Silverstein's book does not quite capture them as nakedly as he wished, it still shows why they should be shooed into the shadows. WM

Jamie Malanowski is managing editor of *Playboy*, and most recently the author of *The Coup*, a satirical novel about Washington, D.C.

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Special Relationship

The British spies who slept their way through Washington during World War II

By Britt Peterson

The Irregulars: Roald Dahl and the British Spy Ring in Wartime Washington

by Jennet Conant
Simon & Schuster, 416 pp.

When Winston Churchill described, in 1946, the "special relationship" between the United States and Great Britain, he was eliding a few inconvenient details. Much has been written about American isolationism before the war—Charles Lindbergh, America Firsters, "Let God Save the King," and so on. But even after Pearl Harbor, as Jennet Conant describes in her mostly entertaining new book, *The Irregulars: Roald Dahl and the British Spy Ring in Wartime Washington*, "a certain amount of ambivalence, if not residual anti-British sentiment," still prevailed. Working avidly to conquer it was the British Security Coordination (BSC), an underground network of British spies and propagandists operating out of Rockefeller Center under the direction of William "Intrepid" Stephenson. The BSC's agents included, famously, Ian Fleming and Noël Coward, and, less famously, Roald Dahl, the author of classic children's books such as *Matilda* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

The BSC had been formed in 1940 to do all that "could not be done by overt means, to assure sufficient aid for Britain and eventually to bring America into the war," as the official BSC history puts it. This included intelligence gathering in North America and ploys to garner American popular support, ranging from the subtle to the wildly unorthodox. One famous BSC gambit involved the hiring of Hungarian astrologer Louis de Wohl to predict Hitler's downfall; Stephenson, a valiant and crafty superspy, even arranged for one of de Wohl's more minor predictions—that an ally of Hitler's would go insane—to come true for added verisimilitude. (The implausibility of this trick may have reflected, more than anything, certain assumptions about the American public's gullibility: "It is unlikely," the BSC history explains, "that any propagandist would seriously attempt to influence politically the people of England, say, or France through the medium of astrological prediction. Yet in the United States this was done with effective if limited results.") It has been reported that at its peak, the BSC employed three thousand agents within the U.S.

After Pearl Harbor and America's entrance into the war in 1942, the BSC's role altered. Instead of trying to change America's direction, the problem now was keeping it on track. In Washington, at least, this primarily meant encouraging Franklin Delano Roosevelt's stability as president. It was to this end that Roald Dahl's singular assortment of gifts was deployed.

Dahl was born in Wales, the son of Norwegian immigrants, and joined up with the RAF in East Africa almost as soon as the war broke out. Within two years, he had injured himself badly enough to be declared unfit to fly, and was shipped home to England. In 1942, the Foreign Office assigned him to the Washington, D.C., office of the British embassy to serve as "assistant air attaché," a job that mostly involved a dulling round of lectures, luncheons, and banquets. Only twenty-five at the time, and accustomed to the high-glamour, high-risk world of jet fighting, Dahl chafed at the assignment. He sought out more exciting freelance opportunities, first as a writer, selling fictionalized accounts of his wartime adventures to American magazines, and then as a part-time spy for the British government.

Dahl was an extremely useful informant on internal affairs. Upon arriving in Washington, he quickly fell into an elite social network that included the wealthy Texas press

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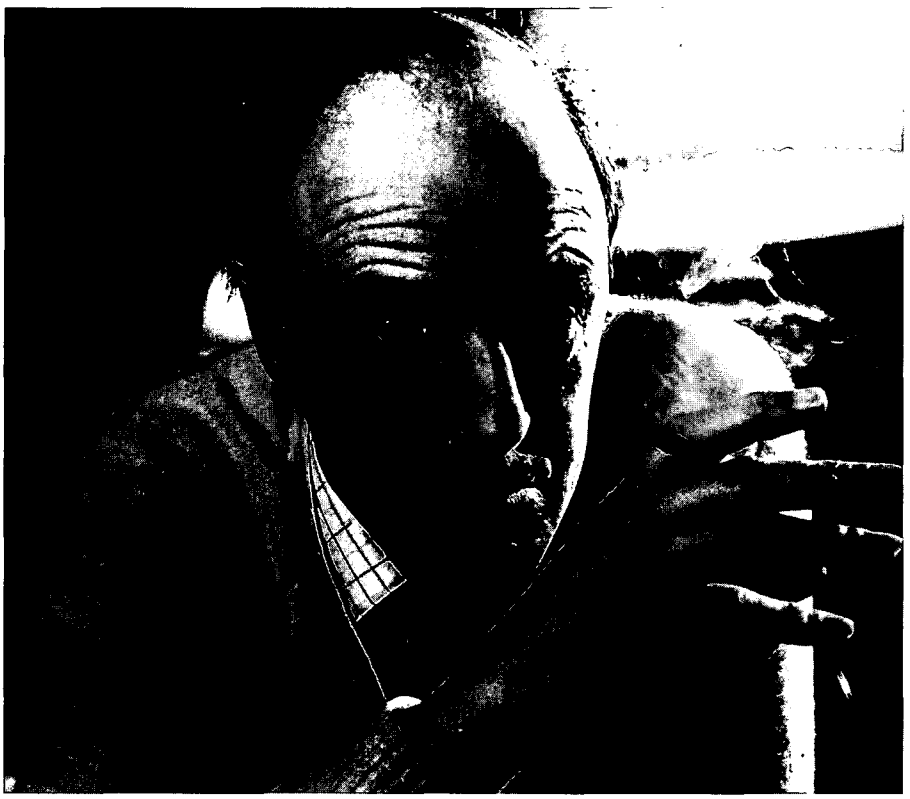
baron Charles Marsh and FDR's anti-imperialist vice president, Henry Wallace (a persistent thorn in Churchill's side). He began collecting information at all those boring luncheons and cocktail parties and reporting back to his superiors in the BSC. As his social status in Washington grew—to the point where he was visiting the Roosevelts at their family retreat in Hyde Park—he became even more valuable to the Brits.

However, it was Dahl's unscrupulousness with women that proved especially handy. At one point Dahl was dispatched to seduce Clare Boothe Luce, the conservative, anti-British congresswoman, in the hope that the affair would soften her position against Churchill. The assignment apparently gave Dahl some trouble: "That goddamn woman has absolutely screwed me from one end of the room to another for three goddamn nights," Dahl complained to a friend. In Conant's telling, Dahl comes across as not merely duplicitous, but also ambitious, reckless, and occasionally cruel. (His fellow BSC operative, the advertiser David Ogilvy, would remark, "When [women] fell in love with him, as a lot did, I don't think he was nice to them.")

Conant, a former *Vanity Fair* writer, is especially strong when describing the luxe war-era cocktail parties thrown by eccentric hostesses like the rabidly isolationist Evalyn Walsh McLean, who received guests wearing the magnificent Hope diamond around her neck, "jokingly warning onlookers, 'Don't touch it, bad luck you know.'" A far different scene was to be found at Longlea, Charles Marsh's estate in the Blue Ridge Mountains, where Marsh's wife, the beautiful but difficult Alice, presided over a cast of characters that included Texas senator Lyndon B. Johnson—her longtime lover—and other prominent Democrats.



From DC With Love: Children's author and spy Roald Dahl

Unfortunately, *The Irregulars* loses some energy when it turns from Dahl's socializing to his actual work. This is understandable, since the work he did doesn't seem to have been all that interesting. For instance, apart from reporting on wild party talk and keeping tabs on Wallace's links to communist groups, Dahl was tangentially involved in some rather numbing discussions over postwar allocations of airspace; Conant's descriptions of these negotiations are dutiful at best.

The problem with the airspace sections is the main problem with the book in general: the focus on Dahl is, ultimately, limiting. The BSC's most important work happened before the war started, and Dahl arrived in D.C. in 1942. Conant tries to broaden her scope by including lively sections on Fleming and Ogilvy, which does something to make up for what's lacking in Dahl's story. Fleming, for example, was trained at Camp X, Stephenson's espionage boot camp outside Toronto, and would later base his James Bond character partly on Stephenson. Ogilvy also went to Camp X: "I was taught to use a revolver, to blow up bridges and power lines with plastic, to cripple police dogs by grabbing their front legs and tearing their chests apart, and to kill a man with my bare hands." Dahl's service to the Crown, unfortunately, doesn't make quite as good reading.

The Irregulars follows its characters into their postwar lives: Dahl became famous for his children's books—some, like *Fantastic Mr. Fox* and *Danny the Champion of the World*, include wonderfully elaborate subterfuges—as well as for many short stories for adults. (His colleague in the BSC, Noël Coward, would say that in all of his adult fiction, there was "an underlying streak of cruelty and macabre unpleasantness, and a curiously adolescent emphasis on sex.") Dahl married twice and died in 1990; he was most famous in his later years for a series of grouchy anti-Semitic remarks in the press. But his early life as a spy has been largely ignored, until now. Conant has done a fine job of digging through old letters, interviewing the few people still living who remember Dahl's BSC days, and trying to fact-check the various boastful memoirs from his fellow spies. If she seems to find the ostentatious, nepotistic—and instantly recognizable—D.C. social world a bit more interesting than the internal machinations of FDR's wartime government, it's hard to fault her for it. WM

Britt Peterson is the assistant managing editor of the *New Republic*.

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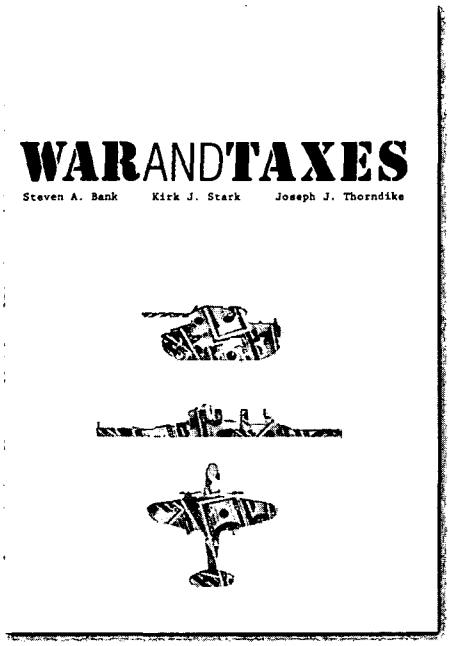
Pay to Win

Raising taxes during wartime has never been fun. Why other presidents did it

By Ajay K. Mehrotra



War and Taxes

by Steven A. Bank, Kirk J. Stark, and Joseph J. Thorndike
Urban Institute Press, 224 pp.

In April 2003, two weeks after the United States launched the invasion of Iraq that currently costs Americans $12 billion a month, then House majority leader Tom DeLay declared that "Nothing is more important in the face of war than cutting taxes." The next month, DeLay followed through by joining his fellow House Republicans in passing a package of tax cuts that the Congressional Budget Office estimated would drain nearly $61 billion from the federal treasury in 2003 alone.

Just decades earlier, when military hawks were also deficit hawks, such words and deeds would have been unimaginable. As one Republican lawmaker explained in 1967, "I just don't see how we can be hawks on the war and then vote against taxes to pay for it." This contrast in wartime tax policy is the subject of *War and Taxes*, a provocative and fascinating new book by tax scholars Steven A. Bank, Kirk J. Stark, and Joseph J. Thorndike. Synthesizing earlier historical scholarship, the authors examine the social, political, and economic conditions that have driven fiscal policymaking during every major U.S. conflict from the American Revolution to the present entanglements in Iraq and Afghanistan. The result should be required reading for all lawmakers—no matter who wins in November.

War and Taxes isn't intended as a partisan brief against the Bush administration and its penchant for tax cuts and deficit spending. Instead, the authors have set out to provide a judicious, if at times ironic, history of opposition to wartime tax increases. In contrast to the conventional presumption that wartime patriotism has always and everywhere trumped self-interest, they contend that America's "commitment to wartime fiscal sacrifice has always been uneasy—and more than a little ambiguous." Although they concede that the Bush administration's wartime tax cuts mark an "abrupt departure" from "a strong tradition of wartime fiscal sacrifice," the authors seek to show that our current president is not the first commander in chief "to delay, deny, and obscure the trade-off between guns and butter."

The book's carefully marshaled historical evidence, however, spotlights the unprecedented nature of George W. Bush's fiscal policies. And herein lies the irony: *War and Taxes* does provide a valuable corrective to the overly romanticized history of wartime sacrifice, but it can also be read as a damning indictment of recent policy. Past leaders may have contested and cloaked the need for wartime tax hikes, fearing the political consequences or biding time for more opportune moments. Eventually, however, they all gave in. Only the Bush administration has resolutely failed to accept its fiscal responsibilities.

The importance of wartime fiscal discipline was perhaps most evident during the Civil War. Initially, both Northern and Southern leaders dodged and disavowed the need for painful fiscal sacrifices, because each side believed that the conflict would be short and painless. But when the cost of the war escalated, the Union ratcheted up existing levies and enacted the first federal income tax to finance the war. By contrast, the Confederacy—buoyed by its outsize military confidence and burdened by its antidemocratic political culture—continued to resist nearly any form of centralized taxation until it was too late. And while the North relied on a variety of broad-based taxes to underwrite the war, the South mainly printed money and used unsupported public debt, which led to disastrous inflation. At the start, Abraham Lincoln may have resisted tax hikes, but unlike

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Jefferson Davis, he mustered the political will to go against business interests and other opponents of wartime tax increases.

Although Americans were initially divided over U.S. entry into World War I, they seemed to embrace the notion of shared sacrifice once the country officially entered the conflict. Building upon the achievements of the Progressive movement, including the advent of a graduated income tax, Woodrow Wilson and his congressional allies unleashed a fiscal revolution by funding the Great War with a host of "soak-the-rich" tax laws. Marginal rates soared to nearly 80 percent, and Congress levied taxes on inheritance and "excess" wartime profits. These ideas were stretched further during World War II.

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In what is perhaps the book's most compelling account, the authors show how the sense of civic engagement triggered by the attacks on Pearl Harbor spurred a second fiscal revolution, one that transformed our income tax system from a "class" tax to a "mass" tax affecting a broad cross-section of the population. Though business elites quietly protested tax increases, Franklin Delano Roosevelt asked the country to put "patriotism ahead of pocketbooks." "I have called for sacrifice," he told Congress, "and a part of sacrifice means the payment of more money in taxes."

But as World War II gave way to the Cold War and more ambiguous foreign entanglements, appeals to patriotism were no longer enough. The timing of wartime tax hikes became pivotal. Contrasting the fiscal policies of the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, *War and Taxes* makes a convincing case for the importance of "striking while the iron is hot." Soon after American troops reached Korea in 1950, the statesman John Foster Dulles declared that "the time for sacrifice and discipline is here ... There will be fewer automobiles, television sets, and gadgets to buy and there will be bigger tax bills to pay." Taking advantage of the combination of general prosperity, the political pressures of McCarthyism, and bipartisan congressional support for the conflict, the Truman administration swiftly transformed a preconflict tax relief bill into a major wartime tax increase, the largest in nearly a decade. Committed to not passing the buck to the next generation, lawmakers forged a tax policy that, the authors write, became "the closest the country has ever come to a pure 'pay as you go' approach to war financing."

Truman would be the last president to show this kind of wartime fiscal resolve. By the mid-1960s, with the war in Vietnam and the war on poverty both in full swing, Lyndon Johnson claimed that the nation could continue its massive spending without increasing taxes. "This nation is mighty enough, its society healthy enough, its people are strong enough to pursue our goals in the rest of the world while still building a Great Society here at home," he told Congress in his 1966 State of the Union Address. "Time may require further sacrifices. And if it does, then we will make them. But we will not heed those who wring it from the hopes of the unfortunate here in a land of plenty."

Reality soon caught up with Johnson—within a year, he requested an income tax "surcharge" linked to increased spending for Vietnam. The tax hike was not enacted until eighteen months later, but by then Johnson's misplaced optimism had taken a toll on the president as well as the budget. Near the end of his life, he bitterly recalled how "that bitch of a war" had "killed that lady I really loved—the Great Society."

Johnson's critical error, the authors argue, was his failure to channel the American public's initial support for the Vietnam War into shared sacrifice, as Truman had done in Korea. It was a mistake repeated by George W. Bush, who told Americans after 9/11 to go shopping instead of asking us to buy bonds or pay higher taxes. But Johnson ultimately signed off (albeit begrudgingly) on a major tax hike and domestic spending cuts shortly after he announced his decision not to seek reelection. Bush's continued reluctance to account for his astronomical war debt reveals how the current administration has broken with a long-standing tradition of shared wartime sacrifice.

The authors are correct to caution against contrasting present policy with a "cardboard cutout version of the imagined past." Received wisdom is often overly simplified. But it is also sometimes accurate. Our present leaders have not only squandered opportunities to harness wartime sacrifice, they have also abdicated any sense of fiscal accountability.

To their credit, the authors admit this "inescapable fact," and the last chapter of *War and Taxes* is thus a seemingly incongruous but plausible explanation for why the Bush administration is flying in the face of history. The authors suggest that the recent inversion in the politics of wartime taxation may be explained by broader changes in economic, political, and social conditions, namely the growing insignificance of inflation, the marginalization of deficit concerns, and the end of the draft.

Still, it is difficult to come away from this balanced, thorough, and nonpartisan account without thinking that we have arrived at a new era of wartime tax policymaking. Earlier administrations and Congresses may have had momentary lapses of resolve, but today we seem to have entered a new age of sustained fiscal irresponsibility—an era in which too many political leaders cling to the dubious claim that "nothing is more important in the face of war than cutting taxes." WM

Ajay K. Mehrotra teaches law and history at Indiana University, Bloomington. He is currently at work on a book about taxation and American state building during the Progressive Era.

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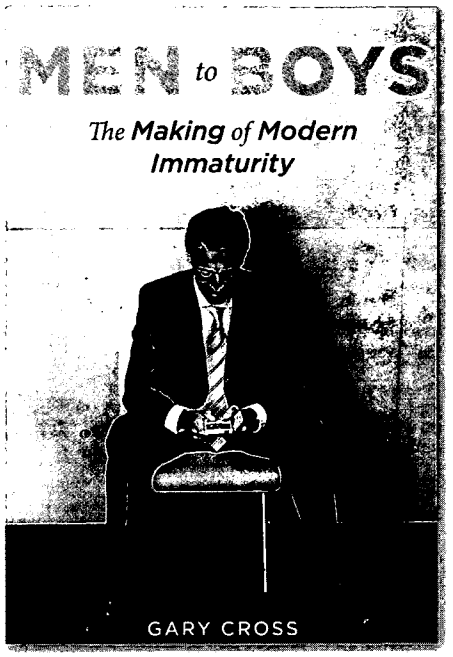
Modern Immaturity

Why it's okay for twenty-eight-year-olds to play Halo 3

By Doron Taussig



Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity
by Gary Cross
Columbia University Press, 328 pp.

A lot of people seem to be worried about me these days. Well, not me specifically, but my generation, and my demographic: twenty- and thirtysomething middle-class men. In a January essay in *City Journal*, editor Kay Hymowitz dubbed us "child-men," and said that we're "not very promising husbands and fathers." The same month, in an op-ed in the *Dallas Morning News*, conservative columnist Rod Dreher wrote that we are "conscious only of [our] desires and the impulse to fulfill them." Then this past May, A. O. Scott of the *New York Times* theorized that in today's America, "a man is, at last, a triumphant boy, with access to money, sex and freedom but without the sad grown-up ballast of duty and compromise." My generation, these critics say, have failed to make, or even acknowledge, their passage into adulthood, choosing instead to live in a state of perpetual teendom. Women are wondering where all the men—and not just the good ones—have gone.

In the midst of this barrage, a professor of history at Pennsylvania State University named Gary Cross fires yet another missile: *Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity*, a 328-page, heavily endnoted attempt to explain how, historically, today's young man came to be. Cross sees big trouble in a number of facts: that men are getting married later in life (the average age at which men first marry is now twenty-seven); that 55 percent of American men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four still live at home with their parents; that more children are growing up without fathers in their homes; and that the culture of what he calls "boy-men" is an "unalloyed pursuit of sensual intensity." This is a pretty broad lament, but it's not delivered crankily—there's not much nostalgia for the social structures of the 1950s in Cross's writing—and so, for someone like me, it's a palatable way to see what everyone's so upset about.

Cross's history starts with the end of World War II, and a generation of men returning home to build both families and a country. Whatever else you want to say about these men, he says, they had a model: Judge Hardy, the father from the "Andy Hardy" movies. It was understood, Cross writes, that a man was to be firm, responsible, sober, and wise.

But things were not so simple in the real world, where, Cross explains, socioeconomic changes cast an obscuring shadow over the role of the father: in leaving the family farm or store for the factory or office, men had effectively ceded domain over the home to women. Rather than daily fathering, a man's household role became simply to provide. Some contemporary parenting experts recommended that fathers "pal" with their children during their time off; others insisted that men focus on discipline ("Wait until your father gets home!"). But nurturing, character building, and role modeling were lost in any case, and what it meant to be a mature man became unclear.

The children raised in this confusion, of course, were the baby boomers. This is Cross's generation, and he blames it for much of what came next. As boomer boys were becoming men, American male identity was being thrown into question, by civil rights, women's rights, and the shifting role of war in society. Some boomers spoke of creating a "new man" to accommodate these changes. The old man was indeed cast aside, and Judge Hardy thrown out the window. But he was replaced not by an updated, idealized father, but by the likes of Archie Bunker—a patriarchal punch line—and the tenets of maturity were laid to waste by the counterculture. Looking back at some of

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that era's political activism, Cross decides that his generation created "not so much a New Man as an unhinged boy."

No viable new definition of manhood was ever formed. And as the boomers grew older, they began to panic, obsessing over their lost youth and trying to preserve it with diets, spa treatments, and a culture of nostalgia. Cross has a strong passage about Viagra, and how a decline in sexual potency, understood by previous generations as a natural biological development, suddenly became a "dysfunction." The norms of youth needed to be preserved at all ages.

And so the boomers begat the boy-men. Today, Cross says, the culture of men and the culture of boys have merged. Males who should be behaving like adults read *Maxim*, watch *South Park*, and ride roller-coasters. Two out of three male college students still play what Cross terms "children's and teens' games"—video games such as EverQuest and Spore—even though "part of the process of growing up is shunning the things of childhood." (Cross produces a quote from a man on an EverQuest newsgroup who claims, "I found dumping the women is the easiest way to find time to play ... Sacrifices are needed if you want to be high-level.") The present generation's sense of style—metrosexuality, according to Cross—"suggests the boy-man" as well, obsessed as it is with remaining young.

All of these habits, Cross says, are the trappings of men who, in their own lives, choose indulgence over restraint, and entertainment over responsibility. While Cross balks at defining "maturity" concretely, he does argue that society's old "markers of male maturity" were rejected without ever being replaced—that is, we have no models for men, and so men remain boys. He concludes that we need a new definition of manhood—not Judge Hardy, necessarily, but a new New Man in keeping with today's social and economic realities. He offers a few general suggestions.

Let's first consider the defining characteristics of Cross's "boy-man" phenomenon, and ask which of them truly constitute a problem. Then we can talk about new definitions.

Start with pop culture, and the dreaded video game. Much of critics' trouble with video games seems to stem from the word "game," and its association with children. I myself don't play video games, but it seems to me a bit off to indict them as childlike just because children play them. Video games, after all, have evolved in recent years into a full-fledged form of media, like books or movies (and they do grow in complexity as the user gets older). The reason men of previous generations didn't play them is because they didn't exist.

(As for the guy who says he replaced women with video games because he *prefers* them? He's lying.)

You might say—as Cross does—that the *content* of many young men's video games is a problem. Cross also indicts the content of young men's preferred TV, magazines, and movies as "puerile." Although there may be some misunderstandings here—*South Park*, for instance, is about eight-year-olds, but it addresses social and political subjects—there's also some merit to the case that my generation's preference in media of all kinds tends toward the juvenile. The prominence of subjects like sex and slapstick in popular culture, however, suggests to me nothing so much as a shift in disposable income and the rise of demographic targeting in media, combined with a large-scale change in the social acceptance of sex (for which we can thank the boomers). I suspect that the cohort of twentysomething males would have gone in for sex in the 1950s, too—they went right in for *Playboy*—had it been more accessible in the culture at large. While some people may object to the shift that's occurred, I don't think it represents some great devolution of the American male in relation to his predecessors—that is, unless something has gone wrong with the way men actually live their lives.

Which brings us to the way men live their lives: the marriages that happen later and later; the years living in parents' basements; the hanging out in bars; the careless hook-ups; and the women who ask themselves, "Where have all the men gone?"

These aggrieved heterosexual women, cited by both *Men to Boys* and Hymowitz's *City Journal* article, make an interesting departure point, because I'm not sure their concern is being understood correctly. Among the women in my peer group, I know of a few who are currently eager to get married. But I'm twenty-seven. When I was twenty-two, I don't think I knew *any*; women of my acquaintance were no more ready to jump into family life than the men were. (Indeed, unsurprisingly, the average age of women's first marriage has risen too.) I'll concede that many women seem to be ready for marriage earlier than men are, and it's possible that when I'm thirty I'll know even more female peers who are growing restless. But I'm sure I'll also know some who are glad they didn't marry the dude they were dating at twenty-four. Because, to the extent that women really are frustrated with men (and neither Cross nor Hymowitz provide statistics on this), it may be due to the fact that a lot of men are assholes, and a lot of men always have been. In the old days, women would have just been stuck married to them.

There's a new normal in the lives of young people, a life stage during which they can be romantically involved and sexually active, but not ready to settle down. This not only doesn't strike me as a problem, it actually seems good.

The reality is that there's clearly a new "normal" in the lives of many young people, men and women both, and it involves a life stage during which people can be romantically involved and sexually active but not ready to settle down or have kids. This is partly a product of changing gender roles and women's economic independence; it's also partly a product of the "creative econ-

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omy," and the fact that middle-class college graduates can spend years casting around in different jobs before settling on a career (and who wants to be responsible for a family before he has a career?). This not only doesn't strike me as bad, it seems like it might be *good*. Sure, there's some awkwardness to it—some broken hearts, some confusion as people cross romantic paths with different expectations. And there are some ambiguities, as things happen out of traditional order: the weekend I began reading Cross's book, for instance, I attended a "baby bachelor party" for an unmarried friend who was about to have a child with his live-in girlfriend (the couple is now engaged). But as the blogger Dana Goldstein noted, responding to a column by David Brooks on what he dubs the "Odyssey years," later marriages carry a lower risk of eventual divorce. "Today," Goldstein wrote, "people marry later because it's a better idea to do so. Both partners get a chance to pursue education, financial stability, and sexual confidence—all things that improve one's chances of entering into a stable marriage for life." The intervening years may even help cut down on midlife crises down the road.

There is one trend Cross identifies that is undeniably a problem: the abdication of fathers. Since 1960, the number of children living in fatherless homes has tripled. And while not every child needs to be raised by a happily married, cohabitating heterosexual couple, it is true—I'm told by every available source, anecdotal and otherwise—that parenting is hard. It involves a lot of logistical tasks, requires a lot of wisdom, and will go better, in many if not most cases, if a second parent is around to share in those duties.

Is there any relationship between increased rates of fatherlessness and the fact that many people now spend their twenties in an unsettled state? Maybe. Fatherlessness is at least in part a result of the economic viability of single motherhood. More importantly, many absentee fathers don't actually belong to the demographic Cross is examining. He identifies his "boy-man" as middle class, and many absentee fathers are poor—a distinction he misses completely. Still, it's possible that, surrounded by peers who aren't parenting and who are accustomed to living without a sense of responsibility to others, some percentage of middle-class men will misinterpret social expectations and abjure their fathering duties, either through outright abandonment or malign indifference.

But it also stands to reason that children benefit from the fact that their fathers got married later in life. The recent college graduates whom Cross wishes were acting more like grown-ups are really pretty young. When I was twenty-two, my friends and I were still a roaring hormonal mess, half-formed emotionally and driven to distraction by an obsession with self-definition. It's only now, in the second half of my twenties, that I'm starting to see the edge come off my peers as they settle into themselves, like puppies that stop chewing furniture and pulling on the leash.

Toward the end of *Men to Boys*, Cross says that we need to "[rethink] male maturity." Certainly, we should rethink how society treats maturity with regard to parenting. A recent study by sociologist Robin Simon of Florida State University found that childless adults, by and large, are more content than people with kids—a sign that we should try to improve incentives and support for parenting (more worksite daycare, say) while also increasing the penalties for and taboos against parental abdication. Other than that, it's true that men are often immature in any number of ways, including being violent, driving aggressively, allowing their egos to rule them, and cheating at pickup basketball. But these behaviors don't strike me as a generational problem, and have little to do with laughing at Adam Sandler or playing video games. Missives about how these actions signal a major social problem read a lot to me like a parent (but not my parents!) complaining that his child has embraced a culture he himself just doesn't understand.

To be sure, my generation is in trouble. We've come of age in the midst of a housing crisis, in a nation with declining resources, massive deficits, and reduced standing in the world. To arguments like Cross's, we should just say: Sir, we appreciate your concern, but we're comfortable with our model of adulthood. Your generation made better role models than you think! Now, if you could just focus on leaving us a healthy country, we'd be even further in your debt. WM

Doron Taussig is news editor at the *Philadelphia City Paper*.

John-Francis Bourke

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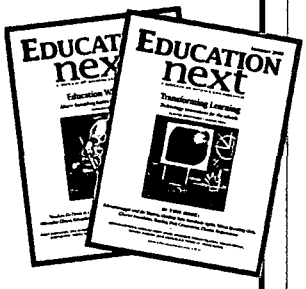

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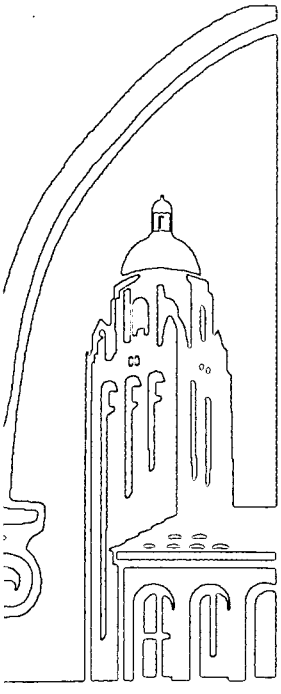

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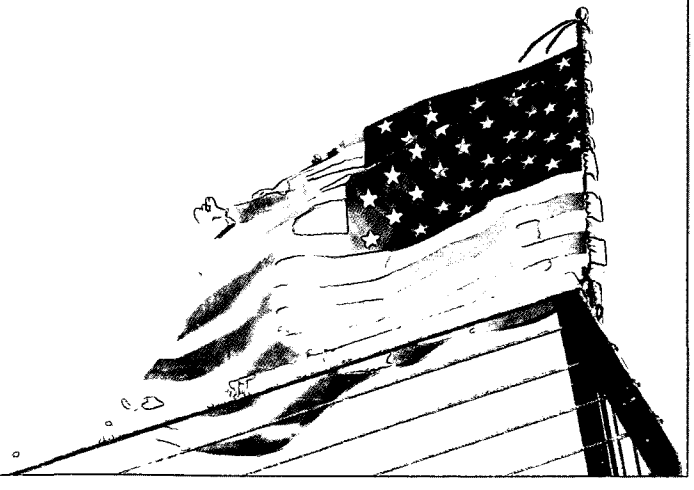

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